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Updated Child Fatality Information Now Available

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) announced today the publication of updated child fatality information on its website. DCFS' child fatality webpage includes statistical information on total fatalities, fatality determinations (such as cause of death), and child fatality demographics, among other data.

"The death of a child in our community understandably affects us all very deeply," Director Bobby D. Cagle said. "It's natural for families and community members to want immediate answers. While state law protects the confidentiality of records for children and families who may have come to the attention of child protective services, we are able to share statistical data. My guiding principle has always been to make information available as quickly as possible under the law. We are public servants and we are accountable to Los Angeles County residents."

The updated statistical information, compiled by the department's Senate Bill (SB) 39 unit, spans the months of January through May 2020. Information on the child fatality webpage is updated every six months and is accessible at <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/resources/child-fatality-data/>.

While State law protects the confidentiality of children, siblings, and their families and prohibits confirming or commenting on whether a child or family has been involved with the department, the SB 39 unit is key to keeping the public informed. The unit is named after Senate Bill 39, a law that allows DCFS to release certain specific information upon request, when there is a "reasonable suspicion" that the death was the result of abuse and/or neglect. DCFS may release certain redacted records within its file upon request when the fatality has been determined (by our department, law enforcement, or the Coroner) to be the result of abuse and/or neglect.

Last year, the unit processed over 275 SB 39 requests for case records, many of which are made by news media. Prior to releasing any records where the death was determined to be the result of abuse and/or neglect, the unit must redact any information that would, after consultation with the District Attorney, jeopardize a criminal investigation or proceeding, and must also provide notice to counsel for any child who is directly or indirectly connected to the juvenile case file, so that they may have opportunity file an objection, and seek relief from the juvenile court. If a case does not meet SB 39 criteria, however, the department is legally prohibited from



providing any information. In such instances, members of the public and news media may ask the Juvenile Court for access to the records by filing a petition.

“We have an obligation not only to be as thorough and complete as possible in our investigations of a child death but also to advance the truth,” Director Cagle said. “This is absolutely necessary to keep children safe, and to learn from a tragedy.”

In a county of 10 million inhabitants, DCFS needs every resident to be watchful and ensure that homebound children remain safe. If you believe a child is in danger, or experiencing abuse or neglect, please call the Child Protection Hotline. The hotline may be reached 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 800-540-4000.

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About the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

The Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) promotes child safety and well-being by partnering with communities to strengthen families, keeping children at home whenever possible, and connecting them with stable, loving homes in times of need. As the largest child protective services agency in the nation, DCFS is responsible for ensuring the safety of more than two million children across 88 diverse cities in Los Angeles County. Established in 1984 to keep children safe and support families in crisis, it is one of the 35 Los Angeles County Departments governed by the five-member Board of Supervisors with nearly 9,000 staff across 20 regional offices, specialized bureaus, and administration that cover a broad array of services and programs. The department is led by Director Bobby D. Cagle - a former foster child and longtime social worker. For more information, visit <http://dcfs.lacounty.gov>.