

**PRESS RELEASE
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October 8, 2018

DCYF expert calls for immediate House and Senate review of long-delayed DCYF legislation that would satisfy federal concerns

Harvard-scholar and social services expert Nicholas Alahverdian today slammed the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) after an assessment issued by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The ACF, a federal oversight agency adjured with auditing the DCYF, subsequently castigated the Ocean State's child welfare system. The ACF, under the umbrella of the United States Department of Human Services, determined that DCYF met less than 90% of the criteria outlined by the federal agency.

"For three decades, we have seen reports nearly identical to this one: child deaths, an increase in caseloads, low staff morale, severe child abuse marked as "information" cases — cases that will not be investigated and that are only solely meant for taking reports and not conducting an investigation — and comprehensive pandemonium within the DCYF" said Harvard-trained political scientist Nicholas Alahverdian.

Alahverdian's comments come after Harvard Kennedy School professor Jeffrey Liebman called the DCYF "the most messed-up agency in America."

"What strikes me as most concerning is the relative lack of attention on this issue in an election year," said Alahverdian "Within a month, Rhode Island voters can change the status quo and elect officials who will ignite reform in DCYF to implement the necessary and long overdue changes that need to be made to reform these enduring challenges. We could have been a role model for the rest of the nation had our legislation passed, but because we were stonewalled by the House Leadership teams of both Speakers Gordon D. Fox and Nicholas A. Mattiello, we couldn't get anything out of committee."

The legislation Alahverdian is referring to would have addressed each concern outlined in the ACF report.

ACF's report also indicated that the majority of DCYF's contingency plans for children and adolescents are "inadequate, not developed when needed, or lacked consistent monitoring." Nicholas Alahverdian explained: "DCYF has been an agency that's been steeped in mayhem for over three decades. While DCYF and Trista Piccola may find that they are "trying their best" — oftentimes doing one's best is not enough. This cannot come through internal DCYF regulatory changes alone. The General Assembly must enact legislative change in order for there to be meaningful child welfare change. And due to the urgency and overdue nature of this quandary, our legislators must act during the first week of January that the legislature is in session"

Alahverdian pointed out that members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives have introduced numerous bills to substantially confront issues as outlined in the ACF report. All bills

introduced and co-sponsored by members of the House and Senate such as Ray Hull, David Bennett, Anastasia Williams, former Rep. Bob DaSilva, Scott Guthrie, Frank Maher, Josh Miller, Art Handy, Michael Marcello, and many others have all been held for further study.

This has been the case under the past two Speakers — Fox and Mattiello. The bills killed in their respective committees had a substantial chance at improving the ACF audit results since the legislation would have addressed the issues relevant to the aforesaid audit. “The goal is not to achieve political success,” Alahverdian said. “It’s to stymie child abuse and family instability.”

“Speaker Mattiello and Governor Raimondo have placed children and adolescents that are in the care of the state in a rather precarious predicament. On a daily basis, the Legislative and Executive leadership and policy staff can make the tough decisions to allocate special funding for increased foster care training and placement and permanent school placement. Unfortunately, we have seen more of the same,” Nicholas Alahverdian said. “There are no new announcements or initiatives — only recycling of PR-friendly ‘safe kids are our priority’ canned gibberish.”

DCYF has yet to release their own versions of Alahverdian’s comprehensive legislation to improve and enhance the agency.

“We have seen a lack of stability over 30 years and four governors, said Nicholas Alahverdian. We have seen a lack of care. And now — in an election year — we have seen a complete and utter lack of bureaucratic mastery to obliterate the red tape and provide tangible, enduring solutions to children and adolescents in state care.

Alahverdian continued: “Gina Raimondo and Nicholas Mattiello have had a copious amount of time to resolve the DCYF disaster. It’s time to elect a a new governor and a new representative from Cranston’s 15th District — not only because Rhode Islanders deserve so much better than the status quo — but because the future of the next generation depends on it”

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