

Thank you for joining us today. As you know, my wife Tanya and I have spent the weekend in Miami to meet with doctors caring for Victor, to oversee the review of events prior to this terrible tragedy and to join the many members of this community in prayer and support for those involved.

No government agency can prevent those very few who have lost the core values of humanity... from performing inhumane acts.

But our employees have devoted their professional and personal lives to helping others ...and I know that for every tragedy,

there are thousands of success stories that will not garner headlines and public fascination – but still have a life-changing effect that allows families and children to enjoy this world and the chance to dream of a better life.

As I reported to you on Saturday, Victor's condition is improving and we are optimistic about his recovery. Recovery will be a long road...but we are confident that he is receiving world class treatment from the staff at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

I understand the concern from the community regarding his status and the desire to know more about his progress. As I mentioned Saturday however, we must provide absolute

confidentiality and protection for Victor...and I know you understand this.

The tragic death of Nubia Barahona and the ongoing horrors of what the Barahona children faced would only be made worse if we as a state and a Department did not learn from this sad case.

Today, I want to discuss two very important steps that will allow the public and this Department to jointly move forward.

First, with our commitment to be fully transparent with the information of this case, we will be providing documents that detail the

involvement of our agency and others with the Barahona family.

We will be putting relevant background information on our website

–**www.dcf.state.fl.us** – for everyone to be aware of our involvement with the family.

Our staff and our community partners have worked, literally, around the clock for the past week to review these materials and make them available. This includes DCF investigative files, intake reports, chronological notes, selected personnel files, and letters to Gov. Crist. The website will be updated at the end of each day. Additional case files will be added later today.

In life, in general, and in our difficult line of work specifically, second-guessing and finger-pointing are the inevitable human reactions when faced with tragedy that defies logic. It is impossible, however, for most of us to understand the passion and effort that our investigators bring to work every day. We trust that this information will help the public understand the difficulties in these complex cases.

Second, while our internal reviews continue, I have ordered an independent review to occur as well. I understand the value of having experts who have knowledge of the intricate work we do ...yet no direct connection to this tragedy, to help provide us with an independent point of view which will allow us

to learn and improve, and to provide front-line workers with the tools and resources they need for their incredibly difficult jobs.

It is my pleasure to announce that three of the state's most trusted experts on the subject of child welfare system, communications and management have agreed to join this effort.

David Lawrence Jr. is a former publisher of the Miami Herald and has an extensive history in the world of child welfare. He has most recently led the “Children’s Movement of Florida” as the president of the “The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation.” He is a member of the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet and one of the state’s leading advocates for children in Florida.

Bobby Martinez has been an attorney with Colson Hicks Eidson in Coral Gables since 1997. One of the state's leading civil attorneys, he is also a former U.S. Attorney for South Florida and was appointed by Governors Jeb Bush and Charlie Crist to a number of high-profile committees and is a member of the state's federal Judicial Nominating Commission.

Dr. Jim Sewell is the former assistant commissioner of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Dr. Sewell led the task force that investigated the tragic death of Gabriel Myers. His work led to the changes in the use of psychotropic drugs with children in foster care.

It is my expectation that this review will be done quickly and thoroughly. It is my charge to

this team that I expect their recommendations on what went right, what went wrong, where we could improve and what governance, systematic or operating processes should be addressed further. I have asked for their report to be completed by March 11. I have also asked for their meetings to occur in the sunshine.

It has been a week since this tragedy became public and the pain and shock has not begun to wear off for this Department, our partners or this community.

But I am personally committed to ensuring that we do our best to prevent even one such tragedy from occurring again. We owe it to our citizens. We owe it to our employees. And we owe it to the Barahona children. Thank you.