

## **Prepared Comments by DCF Sec. David Wilkins**

**March 14, 2011**

\*Thank you all for being here today. So much has been said – and will be said - since the horrific discovery of Nubia's body on Valentine's Day and the terrible revelations of what she, her brother Victor and others suffered at the hands of people she loved and trusted. It truly defies words and tries the limits of our shared humanity to comprehend how a precious life could end in such a way.

\*Nubia's tragic life will not be a hidden sadness. We all owe a debt to her memory and all children, to learn and do the best we can to protect what God has given us. Judges and higher powers will hold the fate of those responsible. It is our responsibility now to work together for those who have put their trust in us.

\*I want to thank David Lawrence, Roberto Martinez and Jim Sewell for their incredible passion and devotion as the members of my independent management review team. They examined every detail of this case at my request. These are tremendous people with busy lives who – for no pay and under considerable public scrutiny – provided this state with an unvarnished and insightful review.

\*I know most of you have had a chance to review their recommendations and I encourage everyone to visit our website where their work, and every public document related to this case, has been posted so that truth and honesty are shared with Floridians in an unfiltered and unbiased manner.

\*Over the last several weeks and with the help of this independent committee, we have a good understanding of what went wrong in the overall care of Nubia and Victor.

\*This tragedy was more than just mistakes and poor job execution by selected employees and subcontractors. It was a total systematic failure of the child welfare system created by a fragmented business model with antiquated processes, procedures and technologies and conflicting rules and incentives.

\*These problems were not created overnight and consequently, cannot be repaired overnight. However, today I am announcing several initiatives which will dramatically improve our child welfare system and demonstrate to the community and each of our stakeholders the magnitude of changes we expect to incur to help ensure nothing like this ever happens again.

\*I would like to first talk about a few of the immediate actions I am taking and then follow with some long-term initiatives that we will be pursuing. And for the benefit of the public and our friends in the media, please know that a copy of my comments as well as our detailed action plan will be posted online immediately after this conference.

\*First, we have defined 19 short term initiatives that either have started or will be started this week. Two of these address law enforcement integration, five address Hotline operational improvements, three address CPI improvements, six address CBC and case management improvements and three are for action with central office. Each of these initiatives have been assigned to leadership and timetables established for their completion.

\*Second, we are immediately recruiting an additional 80 child protective investigators statewide and reallocating positions to the Northeast region, Suncoast which is the Tampa area and here in the Southern region. This will reduce the average caseload per investigator in this region from an average of 17 cases per worker to 14.

\*I want to make it clear that this move will not increase the burden on Florida taxpayers. This Department is committed to fulfilling the public need for safety while not compromising the public's need for strict fiscal prudence among state agencies.

\*This Department will continue to reduce spending and lower the burden on taxpayers by focusing on efficiencies gained through reductions in our central office and administrative processes. This Department can and will reduce its overall operating budget, but will not do so on the backs of the front-line workers. I plan to invest more in technology and improved business processes for these workers.

\*This leads me to two more of our important recommendations. We will be immediately launching an overall reengineering initiative focused on the role of child protective investigators. As you know, our CPI process is riddled with problems, such as inadequate training, inordinate paperwork, unlevelled supervision and lack of management focus. Consequently, turnover is enormous, priorities are misunderstood, caseloads are too high and mistakes are inevitable. We will relook at this entire role to define an organization and support model that recognizes the importance of these employees and empowers them with the technology and support they need.

\*Also, we will be launching an initiative to improve the decision making in caseload management of our case workers. You heard throughout this investigation as to red flags and actions not taken. We believe that a redefinition of the case management process empowered by technology can automate the alert and caseload priorities. This new capability, along with the CPI redesign, will require legislative input and approval. However, we can start now on both projects to define the approach, scope and cost of new capabilities.

\*The way we respond to allegations of abuse or neglect is through our Hotline system which receives concerns via phone, fax and email 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is a critical frontline process where accurate information collection, quick decision making and appropriate directional initiatives are essential. This system is plagued by poor technology, outdated procedures and conflicting productivity measurement techniques.

\*In the short term initiatives defined in this report, we are correcting several of these outdated procedures and measurements. We will also launch a project to replace the technology used at the Hotline with expectations to complete this project in less than a year.

\*Equally critical is a point made clear by our independent review team: “Community-based partners that hold contracts with the Department and taxpayers must live up to the expectations all Floridians entrust when they invest their money in this system.” We are immediately asking our contracted partner in Miami-Dade – OurKids Inc. – to create a corrective action plan to eliminate a number of issues that occurred when these children were under their care, as well as addressing the six immediate items defined in the report. We believe many of these corrective actions will be applicable to CBCs across the state and we will assist all of them in their implementations.

\*From an employee performance perspective, three employees have left our Miami office and I have ordered reprimands to our Regional Director and two employees at our hotline.

\*In addition, we are conducting proactive discussions with dozens of employees across the State who are currently under corrective action plans in their current role as CPIs or hotline employees. These discussions will determine if both parties believe actions can be performed to ensure these employees achieve the job performance expected in their role.

\*As I reported last week, I also made several organization and management changes including the Hotline operations and the merging of the program/policy office with regional operations. This will provide improved institutional leadership for the frontline. These are not punitive measures, but actions that demonstrate the standards Floridians expect and that our own employees, who work so hard every day, deserve.

\*Finally, our short-term response must focus on the immediate and personal needs of the children innocently involved in this web of evil. So many people want to help and I treasure and welcome that support. We are working on establishing a trust fund to assist Nubia's siblings as a way to collect the outpouring of support. United Way of Miami-Dade will support this program and donations can be accepted at the Nubia Memorial Fund at [www.unitedwaymiami.org/nubiamemorialfund](http://www.unitedwaymiami.org/nubiamemorialfund) .

\*After you review this report, I believe you will agree that we have serious shortcomings to be addressed. What I also hope you understand is that DCF is the last line of defense for so many in our State and we should all be thankful that more than 30,000 employees and business partners commit their lives every day to help those in need.

\*In response to this tragedy, I have tried to bring full transparency, independent thinking, collaborative input, speed in resolution and bold initiatives to address what needs to be done. I also realize that there are many more ideas and opinions that could assist us in addressing the challenges we face and I welcome that dialogue over the coming months. On behalf of our employees and those they help every day, thank you for your support.

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