

DHS panel has familiar faces

Kefalas, Lundberg, Nikkel named to Legislature's review committee

By Coloradoan staff · March 26, 2010

Legislative leaders have named several Northern Colorado lawmakers to a special committee charged with reviewing lapses by the state Department of Human Services in connection with multiple child deaths.

The Joint Select Committee on Child Welfare will be chaired by Sen. Linda Newell, D-Littleton, and Rep. John Kefalas, D-Fort Collins, will serve as vice chairman.

Also named to the panel were Sen. Kevin Lundberg, R-Berthoud, and Rep. B.J. Nikkel, R-Loveland.

The committee will look into how the Colorado Department of Human Services "dropped" 10 investigations into children who died in 2008 while under some level of state supervision.

The committee will ask DHS Executive Director Karen Beye and other officials about how and why the agency failed to complete 10 of 11 child fatality reviews conducted in 2008.

The committee hearings, which will likely take place in early April, will give legislators an opportunity to learn about DHS. Newell has been charged with drafting the agenda for the committee.

"I am committed to finding every possible step we can take to protect the kids of Colorado," Newell said in a statement. "Keeping children safe is a

nonpartisan issue, and we will work together to strengthen and improve the child protection system in our state."

The committee will hear a presentation from the Child Welfare Action Committee, established by Gov. Bill Ritter in 2008, which worked over the period of 18 months to examine Colorado's child welfare system and made 29 recommendations for how to improve the state's systems. The committee will hear the recommendations, examine progress in implementing solutions and discuss further steps the Legislature can take to ensure Colorado's children are protected.

Kefalas said, "I know that everyone cares about the lives of our children as much as I do, so we are not out to play a blame game. But we do need to ask what can be done better and where does the buck stop?"

Added Nikkel in a statement: "It has been frustrating to see our child welfare system fail us in this way. This committee is a first step toward righting the problems that have occurred. We all have a stake in ensuring the welfare and safety of children who have found themselves in the care of the state."

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