



Joette Katz
Commissioner

DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

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Department Using Data to Identify Families With High Risk Of Child Maltreatment Tragedy and Improve Protective Services Response

Goal of Data-Based and Qualitative Approach Is To Reduce Fatalities Especially For Very Young Children

HARTFORD – The Department of Children and Families today began implementation of an innovative data-driven approach that seeks to increase the safety and enhance the response provided to families with a higher risk of experiencing a maltreatment-related child tragedy, including a fatality. The Eckerd Rapid Safety Feedback (ERSF) approach includes a qualitative review of cases identified to be at an elevated risk for a poor outcome. ERSF, cited by the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities as a promising intervention, applies “predictive analytics” by using information from the Department’s internal data system to identify children who are at the greatest risk for a poor outcome. The identification of children with an increased-risk probability will aid staff in prioritizing these families for potential heightened supports and additional assistance.

Commissioner Joette Katz said the use of this new approach is one part of the Department’s multi-pronged effort to help prevent child fatalities, including a [study](#) completed less than two years ago showing that families with very young children and with other identifiable characteristics are more likely to suffer a child tragedy.

“Experience from around the country shows that there are no child welfare agencies that prevent all tragedies,” Commissioner Katz said. “The research shows, however, that there are factors associated with child fatalities and better identifying them can help to prevent such events.”

The study showed that, in addition to age of the child, other variables that correlated with higher risks include medical issues, unsafe sleeping arrangements, parent mental health and substance use treatment needs, and prior child protection history. Factors found to decrease the risk of fatalities include a comprehensive assessment of parent needs and frequent home visitation by the social worker. Most fatalities were due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome followed by medical complications, and unsafe sleep. Less than 10 percent were caused by physical injury. The most significant finding is that unsafe sleeping was related to the death in one-third of the fatalities, which prompted the Department to initiate a safe sleep policy to increase social worker supervision of sleeping arrangements and to also offer safe “Pack’n’Plays” free to families who needed them.

ERSF is the creation of Eckerd Kids and takes a technological approach to learning from fact patterns that exist within data. Eckerd Kids has worked with a software and data analytics company since 2010 to develop this system. The technology performs real-time predictive analytics on open child welfare cases to flag those with high risk of child tragedy. Quality assurance staff then works with the front line social work staff to establish an action plan to mitigate safety risks and prioritize tasks related to the case. ERSF was first launched in Florida in January 2013, and expanded the state’s approach to case selection by applying analytics to identify those children who are most vulnerable and have a high risk of child tragedy or death.

An evaluation of the new system will be implemented in order to: (a) assess changes in child welfare outcomes before and after implementation of ERSF in Connecticut; (b) document the implementation of ERSF and assess fidelity to the model; (c) identify facilitators and barriers to implementation; and (d) help program managers develop necessary changes in program components.

ERSF is also being deployed in Oklahoma, Illinois, Maine and Alaska. In Connecticut, ERSF is being implemented in three of the Department’s six regions beginning today and in the next 16 months will be implemented statewide.

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