



Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

COMMISSIONER
John J. Specia, Jr.

September 3, 2013

Dear Residential Child-Care Contractor:

I am reaching out to every residential child care provider to share my concern about child safety. Recently, there have been a number of deaths and serious injuries of children placed in foster care. Some of these incidents were due to natural or medically-related causes. However, some might have been prevented. I want to remind you that our top priority is the safety and well-being of children. It is vital for you to take every precaution necessary to ensure that the children entrusted into your care are safe and well cared for.

As you know, Residential Child Care Licensing (RCCL) regulates child-care operations and child-placing agencies to protect the health and safety of children in care. Minimum Standards for child-placing agencies require child-placement staff to have monthly face-to-face contact with children in care. This contact is designed to ensure that children's needs are being met and placement continues to be appropriate. I am asking DFPS staff who are also required to see children monthly to look at and beyond the obvious safety concerns to the more subtle, more easily overlooked safety concerns. I am asking you to do the same.

With the recent incidents regarding children who are in foster care, I am concerned that case managers may not be asking children the right questions or assessing nonverbal communication of small children or children with special needs during these visits. I encourage you to review procedures with your staff to ensure that they are complying with requirements, making quality assessments and doing their part to ensure the safety of children. Additionally, it is important to perform thorough assessments on caregivers at initial verification and ongoing monitoring of verified families.

Lastly, I am requesting the provider community to communicate with me about innovative ideas, tools, and resources that may be needed to ensure child safety. You will be receiving an invitation to a forum that is being set-up for this purpose.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to providing crucial services to children who are most in need of safe and loving care.

Sincerely,

Judge John J. Specia, Jr.
DFPS Commissioner