

2024 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 305

BY REPRESENTATIVES EDMONSTON, ADAMS, AMEDEE, BERAULT, BILLINGS, BUTLER, CARRIER, CARVER, CREWS, DICKERSON, DOMANGUE, EGAN, EMERSON, FISHER, HORTON, JACKSON, KNOX, LAFLEUR, JACOB LANDRY, LARVADAIN, LYONS, MACK, MELERINE, MYERS, NEWELL, OWEN, SCHLEGEL, SELDERS, STAGNI, TAYLOR, THOMPSON, WALTERS, WYBLE, AND ZERINGUE

A RESOLUTION

To direct the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board to study the needs of the child welfare system in this state.

WHEREAS, in August 2022, two-year-old Mitchell Robinson, III, died from a fentanyl overdose in Baton Rouge; and

WHEREAS, according to a report from the office of the state inspector general, in the weeks before Mitchell's death, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) received three reports from his healthcare providers warning that he had clinically responded to Narcan, indicating an opioid overdose, and asking DCFS to intervene; and

WHEREAS, according to the report, caseworkers never made face-to-face contact with the family or made any effort to remove him from their care prior to Mitchell's death; and

WHEREAS, according to the report, Mitchell died approximately a week after the final warning to DCFS according to a pending court case; and

WHEREAS, sixteen days after Mitchell's death, the remains of two-year-old Ezekiel Harry were found in a trash can in Terrebonne Parish; and

WHEREAS, according to court records, the coroner determined that Ezekiel died from blunt force trauma to the head; and

WHEREAS, according to Fox 8 WVUE news, a neighbor alleges that before his death, she filed a complaint with DCFS about the screams she kept hearing from the home of Ezekiel and his sibling; and

WHEREAS, a 2016 DCFS transition report prepared for Governor John Bel Edwards stated that "the population's most in need are underserved" and "child safety is at risk"; and

WHEREAS, in March 2022, DCFS Secretary Marketa Garner Walters testified to the Louisiana Legislature that DCFS was "drowning" and has "never had enough staff in child welfare" during her time there; and

WHEREAS, on January 2024, the WAFB investigative team reported that since March 2023, one hundred fifty foster children had one thousand eight hundred and seventy-six hotel stays; and

WHEREAS, on February 19, 2024, the secretary of DCFS, David Matlock, told WRKF Talk Louisiana that his agency was in a "death spiral" and that it is "hemorrhaging" employees; and

WHEREAS, in the February 2024 interview, Secretary Matlock stated that DCFS "has been eviscerated by funding cuts that have profoundly affected the agency's ability to handle child welfare cases"; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2024 DCFS Annual Progress and Services Report, thirty percent of Louisiana foster children are moved to a new placement within ten days, and forty percent are moved within thirty days, which is below the national average; and

WHEREAS, research shows that foster children require stability to encourage and promote positive outcomes in education and health; and

WHEREAS, there is an alleged lack of provision of physical health and meaningful mental health services to children in DCFS state custody, even in completing initial medical examinations and behavioral needs assessments for children in state custody; and

WHEREAS, in honor of Ezekiel Harry, the Legislature of Louisiana passed "Ezekiel's Law" to authorize the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board to form subcommittees to study the causes of child abuse and develop strategies to reduce the occurrence of child abuse; and

WHEREAS, the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board was created to study the causes and effects of child abuse and neglect, the legal aspects of child protection and foster care, and effective training programs for employees who work with families where child abuse is suspected.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby direct the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board to the study the needs of the child welfare system in this state.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study shall analyze the challenges facing children and families in this state that receive assistance and care through the Department of Children and Family Services and provide recommendations to improve outcomes and protect children.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Partners Protecting Children Subcommittee shall submit a written report summarizing its findings and recommendations to the House Committee on Health and Welfare and the David R. Poynter Legislative Research Library by February 1, 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the executive director of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board and the secretary of the Department of Children and Family Services.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES