

House votes to strengthen Karly's Law

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Statutory Changes will Improve Response to Child Abuse and Neglect

SALEM, Ore. — The House voted Tuesday in favor of strengthening Karly's Law, which improved child abuse investigations in Oregon. Karly's Law is named for Karly Sheehan, a 3 year old Corvallis girl who was murdered in June of 2005 following previous unsubstantiated allegations of child abuse.

Karly's Law was named for Karly Sheehan, a 3-year-old Corvallis girl murdered in June, 2005. "Karly's murder was a tragedy that cannot be remedied," said Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis) who was the chief sponsor of the legislation in 2007. "However, Karly's legacy is that children in Oregon are safer today because of legislation passed in her memory. Because of Karly, more children are able to get the help they need when they need it. Fewer children are left to languish for months or years in abusive environments."

Karly's Law requires that a child receive medical attention within 48 hours if that child is found to have suspicious physical injuries in the course of a child abuse investigation. In addition, investigators are required to photograph suspicious injuries and ensure that those photos are seen by a physician and others involved in the child's case.

HB 2449 clarifies that the medical evaluation and documentation required by Karly's Law must take place even if the child's injuries are known to be the result of abuse. The bill also makes provisions for reimbursement for exams to emergency rooms and private physicians when the exam does not result in a substantiated allegation of abuse. Finally, the bill streamlines the funding application process for regional assessment centers.

"Karly's Law has been challenging to implement, but rural and urban communities have reported that it's working. It has improved collaboration between law enforcement, DHS and the medical community," said Gelsner. "Most importantly, it has put a needed spotlight on the persistent challenge of the physical abuse of children in Oregon."

Last year there were 10,716 unduplicated, substantiated allegations of child abuse in Oregon. Of these, 12 children died as a result of abuse. In 2005, the year that Karly was killed, 18 Oregon children died from abuse or neglect.

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