

Children's Center

A place where healing begins

Seeking Safety for all Children: Karly's Law

Karly's Story

Karly Sheehan was one of 18 children to die as a result of child abuse in Oregon in 2005. Three-year-old Karly was beaten to death by her mother's boyfriend, who is now serving a life sentence for this crime. Karly's biological father, a Corvallis resident, reported suspicious bruises to authorities on two occasions before Karly's death.

Karly's Law

As a result of Karly's story, State Representative Sarah Gelser (D., Corvallis) introduced HB3328, also known as "Karly's Law." Presenting the bill for consideration on the House floor, Rep. Gelser stated: "if Karly had had the opportunity to be examined by a physician that knew how to diagnose child abuse inflicted injuries, perhaps the outcome could have been different. Or at least if the photographs that had been taken had been shared with a physician qualified to examine child abuse investigations – or, if those photos had been shared with the rest of the county's multidisciplinary team, perhaps then this child's life might have been saved." A recording of Rep. Gelser's presentation of Karly's Law can be viewed at Youtube.com by using the search term "Karly's Law."

Karly's Law passed the House in a unanimous vote (59-0). The law seeks to standardize protocols and improve the communication process used by Oregon's multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) to enable them to respond to suspected cases of child abuse more quickly, and to respond with medical professionals specially-trained in assessing child abuse related injuries. In short, the law seeks to improve the system that provides safety and protection for children.

New Requirements

Agency representatives (law enforcement and child protective services) conducting an investigation who observe a child who has suffered suspicious physical injury must immediately photograph the injuries. County Multi-Disciplinary Protection Teams must identify medical professionals with training in child abuse assessments to provide and/or review medical services within a specified time frame (48 hours).

The Children's Center assists with providing designated medical services. The Children's Center also participates in maintaining records and ensuring compliance with the law.