

# STATE NEWS WEEKLY SUMMARY CONTINUED

Governor Frank Keating appointed the special task force earlier this year to study the facts surrounding the death of eight-year-old Shane Coffman. The young boy's mother and her boyfriend face first-degree murder charges in the death.

"The task force started its work partly because of rumors of missing records, secret information and the idea that the case was mishandled," Miller said. "In my opinion, they found none of that, and for that reason, I feel it reflects well on the Department of Human Services."

One of the things the task force did find was what its members called "The Wall," a series of multiple reports to the department, law enforcement officers and others concerning the family and the well being of Shane and his siblings. That information, the task force concluded, was never completely researched by those investigating complaints involving the family, leaving each ensuing official to get only one part of the picture and for the panel to call for improvements in the sharing of information.

Some of that, Miller notes, is already being done, because of a 1995 state mandate for the establishment and maintenance of a central registry of child abuse, sexual abuse and neglect cases.

"We have the first certified system in the United States," Miller said, "that is being used as a model for other states across the country."

Asked whether the system might have helped Coffman by providing social workers, law enforcement officers and prosecutors access to his family's apparently long case history, Miller said, "Possibly, because it makes a lot of that kind of information available to prosecutors, the courts and social workers throughout the process."

Another key component of the task force's recommendations are the so-called multidisciplinary teams, a group of local professionals designed to coordinate child abuse investigations and to minimize the number of interviews necessary with a child victim.

The same 1995 bill that established the abuse registry system, HB1993, also requires that district attorneys, working in coordination with the Child Abuse Training and Coordinating Council, "in counties having 50 or more incidents of confirmed child sexual abuse or physical abuse" convene such teams by July 1, 1997.

Miller, whose child welfare workers would be a part of such teams, agrees the idea is great, but cautions it may not be too realistic.

"First of all," Miller explained, "you don't have all the mandated professions available in all the counties. That's going to be a problem. Secondly, this is a very time consuming process, and you're asking people who may already be overburdened to take on a rather large responsibility. That's going to discourage some people from actively participating."

Additionally, Miller said, there is the possibility of turf wars.

That issue, too, was addressed in the task force's recommendations, albeit in an indirect manner, when the panel suggested that a case manager or lead investigator supervise child abuse investigations.

Miller, too, said the Department of Human Services would see that any legislation needed to deal with the task force's recommendations would be introduced. Without that, he said, "All you'd have is a bunch of paper with a lot of ink on it. It wouldn't save any children."

—SHAWN ASHLEY  
11/04/96

## FIRST STEP STOPPED IN COMMITTEE

■(GIT) The Oklahoma legislature had the opportunity to establish a coordinating body for Medicaid services to children, in the 45th session. Reps. Sean Voskuhl, D-Marshall, and Laura Boyd, D-Norman, authored a bill to create the Family Centered and Community Designed Services Act. Penny Williams, D-Tulsa, was the Senate author of HB2231.

The bill called for community services to take care of everything from child abuse prevention to literacy, through family resource centers, voluntary home visitation, case management, wrap-around services and co-location of services. A "local management team" would be the locally appointed body responsible for the design and implementation of a local service system.

Under a section of new law, the bill iden-

tified the most frequent problems for families seeking or receiving services as: difficulty identifying appropriate service providers; completing multiple applications; "confusing and occasionally contradictory duplications" in delivery of services when services are received through more than one agency or service provider and, "delivery of services available," rather than "delivery of services based on needs of child or family." Ten state agencies were named as responsible for implementation of the requirements of the act.

The bill passed both houses of the legislature in the first session, Juvenile Justice Planner Grace Kelley said Tuesday, then was vetoed by Governor Keating. HB2231, introduced during the 1996 session, was given a do-pass recommendation and sent to committee where it died.

With the new draft, the Commission anticipates another bill will be introduced in the 46th Oklahoma legislature.

State agency heads have until Nov. 12 to suggest changes in the draft plan for Medicaid funds distribution submitted to the NeedsMet Committee of the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, last month. The plan was drawn up by the Institute of Health Services Management of Bethesda, MD.

—GERRY CHERRY  
11/05/96

## INSURANCE

### INSURANCE DEPARTMENT ISSUES INFORMATION PACKET

■(GIT) An advisory letter was sent this week to approximately 65,000 Oklahomans who may possibly be affected by a federal class action lawsuit against the Prudential Insurance Company of America.

The letter, from Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner John Crawford, explains to the company's policyholders that they will soon be receiving a large informational packet from the insurance company.

The Oklahomans to whom the letter was sent were identified as having purchased whole life insurance policies from Prudential between Jan. 1, 1982, and Dec. 31, 1995. Those individuals are potential members of a federal class action lawsuit arising from alleged improper sales practices and misrep-

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*"Society can only exist on the basis that there is some amount of polished lying and that no one says exactly what he thinks."*

Lin Yutang