

Local & State

State officials late in releasing reports on foster children deaths

By Molly Young
The Oregonian

Trevor Secord nearly died at 14. He drank so much liquor his blood alcohol rose to a level that would have killed many adults. Emergency responders rushed him from Warrenton to a Portland hospital. Friends were so convinced he was going to die they told his family about the adult who provided him alcohol. Oregon child protection workers decided not to investigate.

The next time the Department of Human Services received a call about Trevor, the boy who dreamed of building shelters for homeless people was dead. He was struck and killed by a pickup truck on U.S. Highway 101 while drinking with friends.

Any time a child dies from likely abuse or neglect within a year of child welfare workers being asked to check on the child, the public is supposed to be informed. Oregon law requires the state to do a prompt review and disclose what went wrong.

But state officials have not issued those reports in a timely manner — or at all — in the case of every child who has died since March 2017.

A year and nine months went by before the state publicly acknowledged Trevor died after child protective workers received numerous reports that, in retrospect, showed a “theme of neglect” the agency failed to act on. A reviewer who read through case files concluded that a call-taker should have passed along the report about Trevor’s near-death from alcohol poisoning to a case worker to investigate.

But state officials omitted that determination, as well as specific details about their past investigations into Trevor’s safety, from the report shown to the public.

Brenda McKune wonders if her grandson would still be alive had child welfare workers investigated his near-death from alcohol poisoning. “It could have saved his life,” she said. “It may not have, but it could have.”

Child fatality reviews serve two purposes: They uncover systemic problems that need to be corrected and hold the Department of Human Services accountable for missteps that end in tragedy. The agency is secretive about the steps it takes to protect vulnerable children, in part to protect privacy. The fatality reports are one of the few windows into an agency that has consistently failed to meet nearly every federal benchmark for child safety.

Officials are required to carry out the reviews quickly so the problems they find can be fixed to save other children like Trevor.

The delayed, brief review of his death reflects a widespread pattern that has emerged over the past year and a half. Department of Human Services officials have failed to meet legal deadlines to report child deaths and, when they finally have published them, excluded significant facts about most of the children’s lives.

No report for five months

The state didn’t release a single fatality report for the first five months of this year. Since then, the department has made public just six summary reports. In five, the state concluded that the agency made no significant errors that contributed to the deaths. In all but one, more than a year had passed since the child had died.

Leaders of the Department of Human Services contend that changes to reporting requirements in 2017 give the

agency an indefinite amount of time to make public the report of a child’s death, as long as they are conducting an internal review. But state Sen. Sara Gelsler, D-Corvallis, who lobbied for the changes, said interpreting the law that way violates its spirit of transparency and its plain language.

“Without publishing those, there is no way for the public to know the department is following the statute,” she said.

The agency posted two of the six summary reports, including the one on Trevor’s death, during the final two days of Oregon’s race for governor, and one more since then. Gov. Kate Brown drew criticism from her Republican challenger, Knute Buehler, for failing to improve Oregon’s child welfare system.

The governor’s office said it did not ask the child welfare agency to delay reports highlighting the department’s involvement in children’s deaths.

Case after case of children dying or being left in foster homes where they were starved or abused made child welfare a central issue in the election. Turnover among case workers is high. The department completed 11 percent of its child welfare investigations on time this summer, far short of the federal standard of 90 percent.

New leader

Brown’s pick to lead the agency, Fariborz Pakseresht, has pledged since taking over in September 2017 to bring about change. But transparency in reporting the agency’s role in child deaths has lessened on his watch.

Delaying release of fatality reports can stymie wrongful death lawsuits brought on behalf of children killed

after case workers knew they might be in peril. State law makes it difficult to sue if families don’t file a claim within a year after the child’s death. But if they don’t know about mistakes by the state until after that year is up, any claim could be derailed.

A former top civil attorney for the state wrote in a Nov. 16 court filing that large settlements both prompt lawmakers to press the agency for positive change and help pay for needed care for surviving siblings.

“I believe that children slip through the cracks of our social justice system, to the benefit of the financial interests of the state,” Timothy Wood wrote on behalf of the estate of a McMinnville infant who died in 2016. It was his job to help defend the Department of Human Services against such lawsuits, he wrote. Now retired, he works on behalf of surviving siblings.

By law, the Department of Human Services must complete an initial fatality review within 70 days after state officials learn abuse likely contributed to the death of a child. If the team assigned to look into a death can’t finish its report on time, it must publicly disclose that it is reviewing the death and explain the delay. Review teams also must post updates or finalized reports every 30 days after that or explain why they need more time, state law says.

The public summary reports refer to children who die only by their initials and leave out their hometowns and other identifying details. The Oregonian newspaper independently determined which child’s death each of the reports discusses, including the one on Trevor’s death.

LOCAL BRIEFING

BHS grads named Round-Up princesses

PENDLETON — Twin sisters Raelin and Robie Davis, both 2016 Baker High School graduates, have been chosen as princesses for the 109th Pendleton Round-Up set for Sept. 7-14, 2019.

The Davis family has deep roots in the Round-Up, starting with their grandfather, Ernie Davis, who supplied roping steers for the event. Raelin and Robie, 20, grew up on their family’s ranch in Nevada, and they moved to Baker City while they were in high school. Both were members of the National Honor Society at BHS.

Raelin is a dean’s list student at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, where she is studying biochemistry and is a member of EOU’s Pre-Veterinary, Pre-Professional and Chemistry clubs.

Robie is also pursuing a degree in biochemistry at EOU, and she was a presenter at this year’s American Chemistry Society national meeting.



Robie Davis



Raelin Davis

K-9 police fundraiser set for Dec. 8

The third-annual drug prevention K-9 fundraiser for the Baker City Police Department’s drug-detecting dog program is set for Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Baker Community Events Center, 2600 East St.

Social hour starts at 4 p.m., with a K-9 demonstration by Capa, the department’s drug-detecting dog, at 5 p.m. Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. and a live auction will begin at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 and are available at the police department, 1768 Auburn Ave.; at Barley Brown’s Tap House; and at Thatcher’s Ace Hardware.

LDS plans day of service on Dec. 1

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is inviting people to participate in the “Light The World” campaign, including a worldwide day of service on Dec. 1.

To learn about ways to share time, talents and resources, go to lighththeworld.org. Those interested can also print a four-week calendar containing ideas on ways to serve, starting with Dec. 1.

Teddy bear toss at BHS hoops games

People are encouraged to donate stuffed animals to local families in need during Baker High School boys basketball games on Dec. 13 and Dec. 18. Both games tip off at 7 p.m.

At halftime of both games, spectators can toss their donated stuffed animals onto the court.

Keating pinochle potlucks planned

Biweekly pinochle potlucks are scheduled this fall and winter at the Keating Fire Hall, 26502 Keating Grange Road. The potlucks start at 6 p.m., with cards to follow. Players should bring a potluck dish to share, table service and \$2 for the pinochle. Lemonade, coffee and tea will be provided.

Potlucks are scheduled for Dec. 8 and 22, Jan. 5 and 19, and Feb. 2 and 16. More information is available by calling Cammie Miller at 541-523-6108 or Patti Pickard at 541-523-2943.

Angus Association honors Morgan Scilacci

Morgan Scilacci of Baker City is the owner of the senior champion female of the year announced at the 2018 North American International Livestock Exposition Super Point Roll of Victory Angus Show Nov. 12 at Louisville, Kentucky.

Scilacci has earned several awards from the American Angus Association, including finalist for the 2018 Angus Ambassador.



Scilacci

Inspirational holiday brunch planned

Baker City Christian Women and Stonecroft Ministries are sponsoring an inspirational holiday brunch on Saturday, Dec. 8, in Baker City.

The event will start at 10 a.m. at the Community Connection Senior Center, 2810 Cedar St. Cost is \$10, inclusive.

Guest speaker Kirsten Holmberg, a writer, speaker and public speaking coach from Eagle, Idaho, will offer a fresh perspective in her message, “Through the Trees: Finding Christ in Christmas.”

In addition, Baker High School’s Bel Canto choir under the direction of Hannah Violette will perform holiday favorites.

Reservations are needed by Dec. 3. To reserve a space call Jerri Wickert at 541-523-3447 or send her an email at jerrijohn2@gmail.com

OFFICE

Continued from Page 1A

The Bootsma family will own the new building and lease it to OSP.

Local State Police employees have been housed for the past decade in a leased building at Pocahontas Road and 10th Street.

The agency moved there in 2008 from its longtime office at 1050 S. Bridge Street, a building it shared with the DMV for many years.

The new location gives OSP faster access to the freeway. The current address is almost two miles from the closest I-84 exit.

The construction comes after almost a year and half of negotiation between OSP and Bootsma Construction.



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

A new office for Oregon State Police is under construction east of the I-84 Campbell Street interchange. From left, Kevin Arnold and Scott Burton of Mike Becker General Contractor work on foundation footings.

Mobile Service

Outstanding Computer Repair

Any issue \$40 flat rate
Call or Text 24/7
Dale Bogardus 541-297-5831

Get excited about how well your computer runs!

www.outstandingcomputerrepair.com
Refurbished Desktop & Laptops For Sale
House calls (let me come to you!)
Drop Offs & Remote Services are Available
Office Hours 7am-7pm • Monday-Saturday
All credit cards accepted

ELTRYM THEATER

MOVIE TIMES NOVEMBER 23-29

RALPH BREAKS THE INTERNET PG

Ralph and Vanellope discover a wi-fi router in their arcade, leading them into a new adventure.

FRI & SAT: (4:00) 7:00, 9:40 SUN: (4:00) 7:00
MON-THURS: 7:00

FANTASTIC BEASTS: CRIMES OF GRINDELWALD PG-13

The second installment of the series set in J.K. Rowling’s Wizarding World featuring the adventures of magizoologist Newt Scamander.

FRI & SAT: (3:45) 6:45, 9:35 SUN: (3:45) 6:45
MON-THURS: 6:45

THE GRINCH PG

A grumpy Grinch plots to ruin Christmas for the village of Whoville.

FRI & SAT: (4:10) 7:10, 9:45 SUN: (4:10) 7:10
MON-THURS: 7:10

1809 First, Baker City • 541-523-2522 • eltrym.com

“Traveling day and night. Santa is coming for pictures.”

Kiwanis Santa Photos

Festival of Trees Family Day
Saturday December 1
10AM to 3PM

The Event Center
(Baker Fairgrounds – 2600 East St.)

\$10

You will receive
Three 4 X 6 OR
Two 5 X 7 Prints

Visit Santa and Get Your Picture Taken. All Ages Welcome.

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK