



## SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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### NEWS RELEASE

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### **Child abuse fatality reviews to become more transparent, accessible**

*SB 832 makes key improvements to Critical Incident Review Teams*

SALEM – When a child dies as a result of abuse despite recent involvement with Child Welfare, the agency is mandated to review the case to look for systemic errors that might prevent future tragedies. The process was initiated in 2004 by then Governor Ted Kulongoski and enshrined in law in 2007 as part of Karly’s Law.

[Senate Bill 832](#) – which passed with a 27-0 vote on the Senate floor today – will strengthen and modernize the Critical Incident Review Team process in those cases to ensure greater transparency at the time of a child fatality. It also will increase the amount of time the Department of Human Services has to perform a complete review of the case and ensures that the information in the public report includes a complete history of the agency’s involvement with the child and family.

“Fatalities related to abuse are tragedies. They are rarely planned, and are often preventable,” said Sen. Sara Gelsler (D-Corvallis), who was a chief co-sponsor of the bill and carried it on the Senate floor. “The CIRT process is an important safeguard that allows policy makers and the public to better understand how policies and practices are working, and to monitor changes in our communities that may put children at risk. Prior CIRTs have led to significant changes in policy that have made kids safer and prevented future tragedies.”

A Critical Incident Review Team’s primary goal is to review cases and develop recommendations to improve the child welfare system and prevent future incidents. The teams are assigned when

fatalities occur while children are in DHS custody, or when they are subject to a recent child protective services assessment. In 2018, 14 CIRTs were assigned to incidents and seven were assigned in 2017. In 2019, five CIRTs have been declared, with the most recent related to a fatality that occurred on June 2.

“The timeliness and transparency of CIRTs is critical to building confidence in DHS and helping the community better understand how to address child abuse, and how to recognize the complex challenges facing Oregon families and the impossible choices faced by child welfare workers,” Gelser said. “Senate Bill 832 reduces the workload for the agency while improving transparency and accessibility for the public. It is a key part of the strategy to strengthen and improve our child safety system.”

Senate Bill 832 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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