



from the offices of
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Kim Thatcher and Dennis Linthicum

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Republicans kick off Sunshine Week with calls for Brown to be investigated
Lawmakers cite her legislative agenda, perceived cover-up as possible grounds for resignation

SALEM, Ore.—Sunshine Week—a celebration of transparency in government—comes at an inopportune time for the Brown administration. Republicans are kicking off Sunshine Week with calls for Democrat Gov. Kate Brown to be investigated and claim that her legislative agenda chipping away at public records access paired with a perceived cover-up could be grounds for her resignation.

State Sens. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, Alan Olsen, R-Canby, Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, and Senate Republican Whip Dennis Linthicum, R-Klamath Falls, released the following joint statement:

“This perceived cover-up has come to our attention thanks to the media doing hard work to uncover the truth about the Brown administration’s involvement with hiding the death of a baby. This kind of hard work is at the heart of Sunshine Week. We are calling for an independent investigation of Gov. Kate Brown and the role she played in this crisis. What we find could be grounds for her resignation.”

Last week’s stunning exposé by *The Oregonian* shows how important are public records requests and the information they reveal. The story about a baby boy’s death potentially covered up by the Brown administration ahead of her reelection program was unveiled by *The Oregonian* through savvy public records requests. And, while the Brown administration not only offered up redacted records, the governor is behind a massive push in the Legislature to throw tarps on state agencies to block out Sunshine. *The Bend Bulletin* wrote an editorial piece explaining that the death, and the decision not to report it, “came just months after a blistering audit by the Secretary of State’s Office found serious problems with the state’s foster care system, also run by DHS, and Oregon’s children continued to rank near the bottom of all states in educational achievement.” And that, “Brown’s office continues to refuse to say what the message from DHS about the infant’s death said. It also says politics had nothing to do with the decision not to release information about that death. One needn’t be a cynic to question the motives behind concealing the child’s death in a state-regulated facility.”

Oregon child care regulators had yet to inform the public last week that a baby died more than six months ago after he stopped breathing at a Lane County day care previously cited for violating safety rules, wrote *The Oregonian*’s Molly Young. Federal regulations mandate states disclose any death of a child at

licensed-child care facilities. And in recent years, per Young, Oregon officials routinely did so within days or weeks. But all that changed when a Lane County baby died in August 2018. Keep in mind, the governor not only attacked political opponents bringing up the dangers of our state's foster care system and child welfare, but failed in her attempts to stop broadcasting stations from airing any ads about it. Days after one ad campaign aired, a 9-month-old boy was found unconscious at a Eugene day care on Aug. 22 and later died at Oregon Health Science University Hospital.

In response to questions from *The Oregonian*, Oregon bureaucrats brazenly rejected inquiries for four business days to confirm the death. But on Tuesday last week, the Office of Child Care finally confirmed a baby attending Little Big Blessings day care in Eugene died, per *The Oregonian*. The day care owner faced with legal action forfeited her child care license Aug. 23. The owner denied media requests to *The Oregonian*.

Per Young, Melanie Mesaros, a PR person for the Office of Child Care, said she could not acknowledge any death because she was not authorized to. Mesaros was hamstrung from revealing the information by "an internal policy." And records show the Brown administration revised those policies on Aug. 27, the first work day after the baby died.

Mesaros denied to *The Oregonian* that agency officials "violated federal rules requiring states to tell the public how many children die at licensed child cares each year."

And Young wrote that "as of [last] Tuesday afternoon, the state's website still did not list the August death."

Strangely, "Mesaros acknowledged state officials must disclose a death 'in a timely manner' but said 'there's no date for how soon we have to do that,'" per Young.

Most disturbingly though, while Oregonians had been blocked from information about the baby's death, the governor's office was well-aware. On the day the baby boy died, the Office of Child Care sought Brown's input on a proposed public statement "they had drafted about the tragedy," said Lisa Morawski, a spokeswoman for Brown, per Young.

And Young explained that three emails provided last Tuesday show the Office of Child Care was prepared to publicize the boy's death the day it occurred, if it had been asked. But, records also indicate the agency's statement was pared back at the request of an unnamed detective.

"Morawski claimed the decision not to disclose the boy's death was not politically motivated and the governor's office played no role. The draft statement was never released," Young wrote.

"Brown's spokeswoman Kate Kondayen received an after-hours text from her counterpart at the Department of Human Services, Christy Sinatra. The *Oregonian*/OregonLive obtained the messages in September through a public records request," wrote Young. "Brown's office would not disclose what Sinatra texted Kondayen at 6:43 p.m. the day the baby stopped breathing. Staffers redacted the entire message."

Morawski told *The Oregonian* that she would not say what the redacted message from Sinatra said, but indicated that the state's Early Learning Division, which oversees the Office of Child Care, decided to stay mum about the baby's death.

And another case mirrors this issue. This is not an isolated event. An Office of Child Care employee was charged with official misconduct after another death, in May 2018, "for allegedly enabling a Hood River day care that lost its license to continue operating," per Young. "Agency officials never disclosed details of the case or the employee's involvement. Court records exposed the information."

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