

Governor Patrick Establishes Office of the Child Advocate

New office to investigate and oversee agencies responsible for child welfare

BOSTON- Thursday, December 20, 2007-Governor Deval Patrick today signed an Executive Order establishing the Office of the Child Advocate responsible for investigation into critical incidents involving children in custody of or receiving services from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). "There is no government role more important than ensuring that children are protected," said Governor Patrick. "The Office of the Child Advocate will be in a position to look at policies and practices across agencies so that the Commonwealth can best promote and protect the safety, health and wellbeing of our children."

The Office of the Child Advocate will be part of EOHHS but will be fully independent. The Child Advocate is authorized to review any EOHHS agencies' investigation of such an incident to conduct its own investigation as needed.

The child advocate's independence from any individual agency will also ensure his or her ability to identify patterns and system-wide issues affecting services provided to children and make recommendations for improvement. Secretary Bigby and the commissioners of state agencies serving children believe that the Child Advocate is the most appropriate means of addressing potential systematic issues in the way the Commonwealth serves children. The Child Advocate will report annually to the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate on priorities for children's services and make recommendations about how the Commonwealth can better provide services to and for children.

"It's critical that we do the very best we can for the children and families we serve," said Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. JudyAnn Bigby. "The Child Advocate will serve as a watchdog to help us do that."

The Child Advocate will be appointed by the Governor from a list of three well-qualified people recommended by an *ad hoc* group of advocates and experts in child welfare. The group is expected to provide its list to the governor by the end of February 2008.