



7 of 15 DOCUMENTS

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The Philadelphia Daily News

May 4, 2010 Tuesday
FINAL Edition

SECTION: LOCAL; P-com Biggie News Update; Pg. 04

LENGTH: 690 words

HEADLINE: 4 children taken from foster mom who spoke up

BYLINE: By REGINA MEDINA; medinar@phillynews.com 215-854-5985

BODY:

The Department of Human Services, through its provider agency Concilio, yesterday removed four foster children from the home of a woman who alleged that DHS had coerced one of the children into having a late-term abortion.

About 3:30 p.m., two Concilio employees came to the house, armed with notice of the children's removal.

"As of 5/3/10 your home has been closed as a foster facility due to the incompliance of Concilio's Foster Parent Agency Agreement," read the letter signed by foster-care coordinator Jheovannie Williams, one of the employees who came to the house.

This reporter was on the scene when DHS began removing the foster children. The Mayfair teen who had the abortion; her 1-year-old daughter; another minor, 17; and her son, 1, were packed inside a black van and driven away.

Williams warned the foster mother, whose identity the *Daily News* is withholding, that trouble was in her future, she said.

"He told me, 'Find yourself lots of money because you're not going to come out from this one very well,'" the foster mother said.

Williams also said that "they were going to sue me," she said. "He said I had to find a lawyer."

The foster mother previously told the *Daily News* that she had overheard DHS worker Cynthia Brown tell her 16-year-old foster charge, whose name is being withheld because she is a minor, that she would separate the toddler and the unborn child if she went to term.

DHS later obtained a judge's order to allow the teen to get an abortion. Brown drove the teen, who was 24 weeks pregnant, to have an abortion in New Jersey for the first day of the two-day procedure. Abortions in Pennsylvania are illegal once a pregnancy reaches 24 weeks.

DHS paid for the procedure and then requested that two Concilio employees, social worker Marisol Rivera, who has since been fired, and Williams accompany the teen on the second day, Rivera and the foster mother said. Williams drove the Concilio van to the Cherry Hill Women's Center, Rivera and the foster mother said.

Williams refused to comment yesterday when asked about the removal, deferring all calls to Concilio's executive director, Joanna Otero-Cruz.

4 children taken from foster mom who spoke up The Philadelphia Daily News May 4, 2010 Tuesday

Calls were not answered at Concilio yesterday afternoon.

Donald F. Schwarz, the city's deputy mayor for health and opportunity, explained in a statement why the four minors had been removed from the house.

"It's now become clear that the foster mother has violated Pennsylvania state law regarding confidentiality [by discussing the teen's case with the newspaper], therefore potentially compromising the safety and well-being of the children in her care," Schwarz's statement read.

DHS Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose issued a statement late yesterday:

"It is unfortunate that the *Daily News* decided to print an inflammatory story riddled with inaccuracies. The DHS caseworker involved in this case did nothing wrong, in fact she followed departmental policy and procedure. DHS workers remain neutral in medical situations of this nature and would not coerce or force a child to do something that she does not want to do."

Robin Banister, the teen's child advocate, also issued a statement late yesterday:

"My client was not coerced by DHS or anyone else. . . . She is upset with the false representations reported about her case and she is upset that professionals have violated her right to privacy."

But the foster mother is sticking to her words.

"Me? I'm going to say the truth," she said. "I told [Williams] I'm going to tell the truth."

She and the teen's birth mother, who identified herself as Deborah M., maintained that the girl was excited about having her second child. She discussed a name and told her daughter that she was going to have a little brother, but her tone changed after she talked with Brown, the foster mother said.

The 17-year-old foster child, who had no connection to the case that was reported yesterday, was weeping when she learned she was to be removed from the home, the foster mother said.

The teen at the center of the case came home from school upset at her foster mother because the teen knew that she had talked with the *Daily News*.

"She already knew she was being removed."

GRAPHIC: Feed Loader

LOAD-DATE: May 4, 2010



9 of 15 DOCUMENTS

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The Philadelphia Daily News

May 3, 2010 Monday
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SECTION: LOCAL; P-com Biggie News Update; Pg. 04

LENGTH: 346 words

HEADLINE: DHS, Concilio and the full-court press against this story

BYLINE: By REGINA MEDINA; medinar@phillynews.com 215-854-5985

BODY:

When the Department of Human Services learned that the *Daily News* was pursuing a story about a 16-year-old girl in DHS care who had a late-term abortion in New Jersey, it began a legal battle against the People Paper, and a provider agency began to pressure one of the story's main sources.

* The girl and her attorney, child-advocate Robin Banister, requested a temporary restraining order against the *Daily News* April 21 in Common Pleas Court, asking that the girl's name not be published.

Judge Paul P. Panepinto approved the order the same day and added other details not to be published, including the location of the girl's school and foster home, and the name of her birth mother or those of any other direct relatives. He later allowed for the birth mother's name to be published.

An attorney for the *Daily News* said yesterday that the newspaper is appealing the judge's order.

"The First Amendment guarantees the *Daily News*' right to publish whatever details it sees fit," said the lawyer, David Laigaie. "However, within its journalistic prerogative it could tell the story without invading the juvenile's privacy."

* The foster mother said that since word got out that the *Daily News* was working on a story, she has been called constantly by representatives of Concilio, the provider agency that subcontracts with DHS.

Zenaida Maravi, family-services director at Concilio, told the foster mother not to speak to reporters or to allow any "new faces" into her house, the foster mother said.

* Maravi and another Concilio employee entered the foster home at 9:30 p.m. April 20 without announcing their presence, the foster mother said. When she learned that they were in her house, the foster mother looked for them in the teen's room, but when she tried to enter, they shut the door in her face while the teen remained with them in the room, the foster mother said.

* Maravi has told colleagues at the agency that "the [*Daily News*] story is not going to run," sources said.

The teen told her foster mother that "DHS is going to stop the news," according to the foster mother.

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