



NYC Administration for Children's Services



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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DOI ANNOUNCES FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION OF FOSTER CARE PROVIDER
ACS MOVES TO CANCEL \$86 MILLION IN CONTRACTS WITH PROVIDER

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation, and JOHN B. MATTINGLY, Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services, announced today that some employees of St. Christopher's, Inc., a Dobbs Ferry, New York-based not-for-profit with more than \$56 million in City contracts to oversee up to 690 children in foster boarding homes, engaged in a deliberate process of changing, enhancing, creating and falsifying significant portions of foster care case files in order to deceive ACS in an annual audit/review of those records.

The DOI investigation found that the calculated efforts of some St. Christopher's employees to fabricate or falsify foster care case files from 2003, made it difficult or impossible for ACS to determine whether St. Christopher's was fulfilling its responsibilities in overseeing the children in its care. The actions of certain staff members and supervisors as outlined in a Report being released today by DOI, call into question the integrity of not only the 50 case records selected by ACS for review, but every St. Christopher's FBH case record. The falsification of these records potentially masked the conditions in those 50 foster homes, including safety conditions.

ACS has moved to terminate all of its foster care contracts with St. Christopher's. In addition to the foster boarding home contract, ACS is terminating two contracts totaling \$22.8 million to oversee children in congregate care facilities managed by St. Christopher's, as well as \$7.2 million in other contracts for preventive care, homemaking services and child care. The total value of the ACS contracts being canceled with St. Christopher's, all of which cover a period of three years, is \$86 million. As a result of DOI's investigation, ACS froze intake into the St. Christopher's foster boarding home program last July and assigned the cases to other contract agencies instead. Since then, the number of children in the St. Christopher's program fell from 830 to 690. The remaining cases will be reassigned to high-performing agencies in the same communities within the next 90 days.

DOI's investigation began after ACS reported that it had received several anonymous complaints from individuals who stated they were former employees of St. Christopher's and that they had been told to alter, enhance and/or falsify documents contained in foster boarding home case records prior to the annual evaluation by ACS. St. Christopher's, Inc. received below-average scores for similar reviews in 2001 and 2002.

After reviewing hundreds of documents and interviewing approximately two dozen present and former St. Christopher's, Inc. staff members, DOI found that:

- All original progress notes, which detail the history of case actions taken by St. Christopher's, Inc. caseworkers related to the foster children under their care, were removed and discarded from the 50 randomly chosen cases that were to be reviewed by ACS. As a result, no original case records re-

main for those children that would allow either DOI investigators or ACS to determine with accuracy if proper visits occurred or if the findings relating to care and conditions were truthful;

- Current and former St. Christopher's, Inc. caseworkers stated they were instructed by supervisory staff to make changes to case records; e.g., make up visits to foster and birth homes, progress notes, case plans, etc., as if these events actually took place;
- Current and former caseworkers said files were altered or contained documents that had been created bearing their forged initials or signatures;
- Some caseworkers said they were asked by supervisory staff to create case-related documents for cases where they had no direct involvement or knowledge of the specific circumstances;
- In addition to the re-written progress notes, DOI found at least 400 other case-related documents that had been altered in some fashion; and
- In one case, the forgery was obvious: Six month's worth of reports were written in fresh, blue ink but the signatures of the foster child, foster parent and caseworker had been photocopied.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "The falsification of these vital foster care records by some employees of St. Christopher's compromised ACS's ability to ensure the safety and well-being of foster care kids."

"Our overriding concern is for the health and well-being of the children," said ACS Commissioner John B. Mattingly. "There has been a breach of faith by St. Christopher's, and the facts as presented by DOI, made still worse by our own concerns about St. Christopher's, Inc.'s sub-par performance over the past two evaluation years, leave us no option but to terminate the contracts and remove the children from the care of this agency. We will not tolerate such deception from any of our contractors. The children and families of the City of New York expect the very highest level of integrity from our contract partners. We are making sure that these cases are transferred to foster care agencies with high performance evaluations that will properly oversee the children's safety, well-being, and progress toward reunification or adoption."

Commissioner Mattingly has directed ACS foster care staff to visit every child involved in the 50 St. Christopher's, Inc. cases under investigation to ascertain their progress and well-being.

Foster care case records and progress reports are among one of the fundamental, necessary measures by which ACS ensures that the youth in foster care are being properly cared for by their foster families. ACS relies on its contract agencies to find and license foster care homes, place children in the best possible setting, and visit them regularly, assessing their health and safety, and making sure that they are receiving all appropriate services for their well-being. Caseworkers also work with birth parents to prepare families for reunification, ready children for adoption, or make other permanency plans.

In reassigning the remaining foster boarding home cases to other contract agencies within the next 90 days, ACS will choose those agencies that are in the same neighborhoods, starting with the highest-scoring agency in that community district. No children will have to change their residence unless ACS determines that they are not receiving adequate care in a St. Christopher's foster home. Foster families will be given the opportunity to work with one of the higher-performing agencies in their own community. ACS will ask other contract agencies to provide the preventive and homemaking services, and ACS will find interim sponsors for the childcare networks, so that those programs can also continue without disruption. The young people who have been living in a congregate care facility managed by St. Christopher's will be consulted as part of the process to determine the best place for them to be transferred.

"The children will receive better service because their cases will be transferred to higher-performing contract agencies," said Jeanette Ruiz, Deputy Commissioner of the ACS Family Permanency Services Division, which oversees foster care placements. "The children will be quickly visited by caseworkers from the new agency, and ACS staff is prepared to make this entire process go smoothly. Our goal is to minimize any disruption to their lives."

Citywide, Children's Services has contracts with 46 agencies to oversee the cases of 19,279 children living in foster boarding homes and congregate care facilities throughout New York City. The total value of all those

contracts is \$1.27 billion. The foster care census has declined from a high of more than 50,000 in 1991, when the number of children in foster care in New York City reached its peak.

Not all St. Christopher's staff members have been implicated in the wrongdoing. Additionally, St. Christopher's provided DOI with information and some employees came forward and cooperated with DOI. This is an ongoing investigation and DOI is in the process of forwarding information to the Westchester County District Attorney's Office.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.

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