



POLICE DEPARTMENT
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Steve McQueen
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Testimony before the Child Protection Committee of Chief Steve McQueen

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As an introduction, I have been a certified Vermont Police Officer since September of 1978, starting my policing career with the St. Johnsbury Police Department while still attending Lyndon State College. In January of 1981, I was hired by the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department as a Patrol Deputy leaving in January of 1984 for my current employer, the City of Winooski. While with the Winooski Police department, I served as a Patrol Sergeant for 8 years, Detective Sergeant for 1 year, then Lieutenant for 4 years. In February of 1996, I was appointed Chief of Police for the City.

During my many years as a police officer, I have had the opportunity to interact with all aspects of the child/family protection system in Vermont. First let me say, that my experience with emergency services and the field case workers has always been a positive one. Although many officers would become very frustrated with the "inaction" of the system, I understood what their limitations are.

I believe that one of the lessons learned from the recent tragic deaths is that the system is overwhelmed and has not adapted to the need to share critical information about the needs of children and families with police. All three incidents, and many more before them, highlight the need to share information with the police.

As police officers, particularly in an urban area like ours, we interact with families in need all the time. We see situations that are not healthy for children and clearly need intervention. If a child is not in immediate danger of their surroundings, then all we can do is try and connect families with services and make our report to emergency services. After we make the report, we have no idea what the outcome is. What we do receive is a nice form letter that thanks us for making the report. We have no idea what the outcome of any report is unless we are called upon to take a child into custody as a result of the investigation.

In my mind, this is the greatest shortcoming to the current system. We need to lift the "cone of silence" that currently exists within the system that governs DCF. I believe that the Statute will need to be modified to allow for the sharing of information between parties that have a need to know. Currently, the only way we as police officers can be a part of any broad conversation about a family or child is to be part of an empaneled Child Protection Team meeting and only if the case worker decides to invite the police to the table.