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Statement by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas on New County Child Fatality Data

It has long been known that abusive parents were themselves often abused children, but now we have an idea of just how pervasive that and other risk indicators are in Los Angeles. The County's Chief Executive Office (CEO) has completed a review of child fatalities in response to a motion I authored with and Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich last fall, and the results are both alarming and enlightening. The CEO studied the deaths of children from 2000 through 2010 whose families had been subject to abuse and neglect investigations by the County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The total number of deaths in that period was 1,827. Here is what the data show

- A shocking percentage of children who died had parents who may have been endangered children. Nearly one-in-five children (17%) had a parent who had been referred to DCFS as a child. In Los Angeles County, only about one out of a hundred children is the subject of a DCFS referral.

- Most child deaths occur at the extremes of the age spectrum: infants aged one year or younger comprised 37% of the total; teens aged 14 to 17 accounted for 26% of the deaths.
- Gangs and guns appear to be the leading cause of death among teens. In 2010, 52% of the teen deaths were believed gang-related; 80% of the victims were boys. Gunshot wounds were cited as the cause for 31 of the 157 child deaths examined by the Coroner in 2010.
- African American children accounted for 37% of the death total, while only 8% of children in Los Angeles County are African American.
- Child deaths occurred most in areas of high poverty and crime, low educational attainment and poor access to health care. Of the five supervisorial districts, the largest share of child deaths in 2010 (34%) occurred in the district I represent, followed by the district represented by Supervisor Gloria Molina (24%).

“The data show us where to focus our will to protect children: parents,” said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. “We must do more to engage those parents who had themselves been the subject of DCFS investigations as children, to provide support that might prevent tragedies. It’s ever more obvious that poverty, crime and failing health care and education systems must be arrested.”

It is particularly important to resist the temptation to exploit child deaths to push ideological agendas, the Supervisor said: “The CEO’s report shows we cannot honestly link child deaths to specific policies or the performance of particular government departments or individuals.”

In 2010, the total number of child deaths for children with DCFS histories was 175, in line with the annual average since 2000 of 166. “It would be negligent to be satisfied with any total more than zero; but it is also reckless to suggest there are quick fixes,” he said.

“We must shun policy gimmicks that produce sound bites for news conferences but yield no true solutions. We must not trivialize the enormity of the challenge, and we expect that all in society understand this is a problem for all of us to solve,” Ridley-Thomas said. “Government can and will lead the effort, but its conclusion depend on a commitment from parents, extended family, teachers, employers and neighbors as well.”

Please click [HERE](#) to access the data