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## DCF report shows shoddy work in twins' case

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Nubia Barahona, 10, was found dead in the back of her adoptive father's pick-up truck in Broward on Valentine's Day.

Four days after Nubia Barahona's decomposed body was found in the flatbed of her adoptive father's pickup truck, state child-welfare authorities completed a quick review of the 10-year-old girl's involvement with Florida's child protection system, and concluded that a series of abuse investigations lacked "a sense of urgency" and contained several instances of shoddy case work.

Nubia's adoptive parents, Jorge and Carmen Barahona, were charged Monday with first-degree murder, child abuse and neglect for both Nubia's death and events that led up to it. Her twin brother, Victor, was found badly burned by caustic chemicals in Jorge Barahona's truck on

Valentine's Day, hours before Nubia's body was discovered.

On Feb. 18, four days later, state Department of Children & Families administrators completed an 11-page analysis of their efforts on behalf of the children, detailing a host of lapses involving five child-abuse and neglect investigations that followed the twins' placement in the Barahonas' then-foster home, as well as the actions of privately run foster care and adoption agencies under contract with DCF.

The report was provided to The Miami Herald in response to a public records lawsuit filed last month.

A review of the investigation records for two abuse reports in 2010 and 2011 show:

- Records don't document that "diligent efforts" were made to locate Nubia and Victor after the state's abuse hotline received a Feb. 10 call that the children were being bound with tape and locked in a bathroom. The twin's adoptive mother, Carmen Barahona, told a DCF investigator the children were with her husband, a statement police now say was meant to mislead investigators.
- No law enforcement agency was notified of the Feb. 10 abuse allegations before Nubia was found dead. "Based on the allegations of bizarre punishment and physical injury,

[police] involvement would have been critical at the onset of the investigation,” the report said.

- A June 2010 report that Nubia was “uncontrollably” hungry, very thin and losing her hair should have been labeled by the agency’s Tallahassee-based hotline as an allegation of abuse — not as a report that the Barahaonas needed help from the state. Coding the complaint an abuse report could have placed the family under “closer scrutiny” when the investigation began.

Police said Monday that the children had been beaten and tortured for a year prior to Nubia’s death, which would have included the time of the June report. The June investigation was closed with a finding of no need for services or intervention by the state.

- The investigator assigned to the February hotline call, Andrea Fleary, did not attempt to interview the Barahonas’ two other adoptive kids outside of Carmen Barahona’s presence. The two children, the report said, “appeared to be strongly influenced by their caregiver,” and may have been more forthcoming in a private conversation with the investigator. Records, in fact, show one of the two children had tried to tell an investigator about a family “secret,” but was shunted aside by Carmen.

Records don’t specify whether the investigator for a 2007 report that said Nubia was dirty, unkempt and hungry interviewed the children away from the parents at the center of the complaint — though the report said “Nubia is afraid to talk.”

The report also takes issue with the performance of foster-care and adoption workers with either DCF, which privatized foster care around 2005, or Our Kids, the lead foster-care agency now under contract with the state. The Barahonas were licensed foster parents from July 1999 through July 2009.

Records don’t show that the twins were seen by caseworkers every 30 days, as required, and interviewed by caseworkers “during the majority of home visits” through their five years in foster care, the report says.

Notes in case files also do not show that caseworkers contacted doctors, teachers, childcare workers or others to confirm information that was provided by the Barahonas before the twins were adopted in 2009, the report says.

And, most importantly, records repeatedly documented an “immediate need” for dental care for the children, though the kids apparently seldom or never went to the dentist. At a court hearing last month, a Child Protection Team doctor said the Barahonas’ three surviving children all need extensive dental work, including root canals and extractions.

At a hearing of an investigative panel Monday, the head of the privately run Center for Family & Child Enrichment, Delores Dunn, said case managers from her group made 48 visits to the family between June 2005 and May 2009, when the twins were adopted.

During tense questioning by the three-member panel in which Dunn was repeatedly asked to specify ways the process could be improved, she said that, in hindsight, “I would not [do anything] different. I cannot say to you that anything that we did caused this death.”

When the hearing was concluded, panelist Roberto Martinez, a former Miami U.S. Attorney, praised DCF's top Miami administrator, Jacqui Colyer, for her candor to the board, but called Dunn's comments "pretty defensive."

He likened her performance to a congressional hearing, though, he added, none of the participants were under oath.

Miami Herald staff writer Jaweed Kaleem contributed to this report.

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