

ROUGH DRAFT

**CITY COUNCIL OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA
Regular Meeting — June 26, 2001
Partial Verbatim of Orals
Councilwoman Eberwein's Oral (b)**

* * * * *

ORAL PRESENTATIONS BY MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

Oral (b)

Eberwein: I like other Members of Council have now had a chance to completely go over the report from the City Manager with regard to the Katelyn Frazier incident, and I know we are still waiting for the Virginia State report from their Department of Human Services. I have a few questions about it that I would like to perhaps get some answers from and have those presented to Council in the fall after the summer break. I'm pleased with a lot of the actions that have been and are being taken in response to the tragedy. I do have a couple of questions though.

On page 2 of the report, we indicate that DHS identified all of its active high risk child welfare cases and then secured a review of those cases by a team of outside specialists and took appropriate action. I'm curious as to what the appropriate action was and what recommendations might of come out of that. There is a recommendation in here to come up with some appeal guidelines which the City Attorney and the City Manager have said that they do not feel that those are warranted. I've been through the entire report and I don't really see what they mean by appeal guidelines, and so, it's so fuzzy in their recommendation that if that's the reason I can understand why you decided that. But, I was hoping that at some point someone could give me an example of what appeal guidelines would be because I certainly understand that you take into account the individual facts of each case in your decision on whether or not to appeal. So, I was confused by the recommendation and what that meant.

Item 3, I have a question that's on page 4, and that is, well, anyways it is on page 4, and, it says criminal and child protective service background checks, to the extent permitted by law, on all adults residing in a household in which a child who is in DHS custody resides. Is there any way whether or not it's permitted by state law? In other words, I assume what you are saying is that they don't have to submit to this, but is there any reason, and you don't have to answer this now, but I would like to know for the future, is there any reason why we as a City cannot have a policy that if an adult in a household refuses to submit to such an

investigation that we can decide as a local policy to not place the child back with the biological parent if there is someone residing in a home who refuses to take the exam? I would like an answer to that question. We talked a lot about, perhaps, changing our own legislative guidelines, but I want to know if there is anything that precludes us from adopting that as a local policy.

Our goal, the goal that you're under, and I understand very much some of the comments that were made by the investigating agencies, the goal is to unite families. And, I understand that, but speaking as someone who is very familiar with a lot of children who come from very dysfunctional families, sometimes the relationship between the child and the parents is pretty much biological, and a lot of people don't like to say that, but it's true. And, we prosecute people for neglect of animals, but often times we don't do anything when there is neglect. I'm not talking about outright abuse, but neglect of children. Some times that neglect, as we know, can escalate into something more. I am just assuming from what I have read in here that the changes that the City Manager and the department themselves are undertaking is a renewed emphasis in Alexandria that we will slant our orientation when it comes to protecting the child versus reuniting the family towards protecting the child with renewed vigor particularly when those children have a chance at being adopted into a loving home. I have been told that there have been changes, and I understand that there are some legal reasons for, I'm being very careful here, but that there might be some legal reasons why all of the changes have not been stated, but I'm understanding that there have been some internal personnel changes whether those have been initiated by the department or the manager or whether those were done by the staff's own volition. With respect to those changes if there is no legal impediment, I would also like to know what some of those changes have been when you come back with what I hope will be a follow-up to this report in the fall. I assume there will be a follow-up because you will at some point need to address whatever the state report comes out with and certainly perhaps even have to address what ends up coming out from the Commonwealth's Attorney's office. I don't really expect a response tonight, so much as just saying that I'm hoping we will some of these issues address.