

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham issued an executive order on Feb. 17 that will transform the way New Mexico serves and protects the state’s most vulnerable children and families. The order requires immediate changes in how the Children, Youth, and Families Department operates and sets out a long-term vision for how the department will strengthen its practices.

“This is a system that is fundamentally broken, and this executive order sets in motion immediate and meaningful action to transform this system,” Lujan Grisham said. “We are coming together with partners in the Legislature, experts working in the field, and children and families themselves to do everything in our power to make New Mexico children safer.”

The order:

- Elevates the divisions of the agency that need and deserve increased attention and increased transparency: Protective Services, Juvenile Justice, and Emergency Health and Behavioral Services.
- Empowers staff to provide every child who needs a placement in an emergency a placement . This new Emergency Health group will be single-mindedly focused on making sure that every child has a safe, stable place to stay, whether that’s an emergency overnight stay at an appropriate treatment center or a placement with a foster family.
- Brings in voices from every area of the child-welfare community – service providers, families who have interacted with CYFD, attorneys, behavioral health providers. This group will provide another layer of accountability, but it will also be a vital part of how New Mexico rebuilds and reinvigorates the department.
- Builds a system that hears the concerns of its constituents and skillfully responds. New Mexico will establish a grievance system that allows families to engage in meaningful dialogue with the agency.
- Requires the agency to undergo an annual independent audit.
- Creates an Office of Innovation that identifies and brings to New Mexico the best

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practices from around the country that improve child welfare outcomes.

"I have spent the past year studying the systems of care that we have in place for our most vulnerable children, and it is clear to me that we need more acute support to build our way into a better system," Secretary Barbara J. Vigil said. "I am grateful that we have a governor who will give the time and attention to reforming this system to deliver better service to the children in our care."

"The emergency we face in child well-being in New Mexico demands immediate attention, and the steps laid out in the governor's executive order today are powerful steps in the right direction," Senate Majority Whip Michael Padilla said.

"We have worked hard alongside the governor, taking an all-hands-on-deck and problem-solving approach to transform our child welfare system," House Leader Gail Chasey said. "This executive order sets us on the right course. This is a department that has deeply entrenched issues that we must address with urgency, and we are doing that work, together."

"NMCAN applauds the governor in her efforts to improve the lives of children and families in a system ill-equipped to meet their true needs. We hope that the newly formed Policy Advisory Council will understand the challenges families are facing," Ezra Spitzer, co-executive director of NMCAN, said. "Any plan to reduce child neglect must be centered around poverty reduction, and the governor understands that. The expertise to improve CYFD exists here in New Mexico through the voices of young people and families that have experienced these systems."

Gov. Lujan Grisham signs executive order to transform the Children, Youth and Families Department

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