

- 2:30**     **Mary Kate Malone:**  
Welcome to our Live Chat on the recent Tribune series, "For the Love of Children."
- 12:33**     **Comment From John Walters**  
Miss Malone, I understand this story has received state government attention, what would you like the state to do to improve its practices?
- 12:36**     **Mary Kate Malone:**  
Hi John. As much research as we've done, I'm not sure it's our place to decide that. But we do think there are enough voices that there should be some more discussion about it among legislators. Also, there has been talk about a summer study session for the Legislature on this topic, which would perhaps facilitate that.
- 12:38**     **Virginia Black:**  
Hi, John: We've spoken to so many people in the course of reporting this series - not only DCS employees, but also judges, foster parents, CASA, teachers and others who work with children - that we'd probably also advocate for including those viewpoints in the discussions as well. It's a complicated system. And these are obviously complicated issues.
- 12:39**     **Comment From Henry Brunner**  
Confused, why was there \$103 million dollars of unspent funds returned? If departments are saying they do not have the funds.
- 12:42**     **Virginia Black:**  
Hello, Henry. We're not sure where the Department of Child Services saved the bulk of that money. But we do know they've been spending considerably less on more invasive treatments for children, as they focus on keeping children at home as much as possible. Home-based services are much cheaper. And reimbursements for foster parents and adoptive parents have been decreased.
- 12:42**     **Comment From Susan**  
What has your research discovered about the potential for parent education?
- 12:42**     **Mary Kate Malone:**  
Hi, Henry: Director Payne says that the agency has become more

efficient and is helping more children using fewer dollars. He also has said that the agency has found ways to draw down more federal dollars, allowing the agency to save state money.

**12:44 Henry Brunner:**

Thank you, for taking the time to cover such a very important topic, Our children. It has been long time needed to be brought to the top of the priority list. Again thank you !

**12:47 Comment From Dan S.**

Aside from a possible summer study session, is there any hope for legislative action this year? I realize it is kind of late in the legislative process.

**12:47 Mary Kate Malone:**

Hi, Dan. It does not seem likely at this point there will be any legislative action this year, although it is possible.

**12:47 Virginia Black:**

Thanks for joining us, Susan. Those who work in the system see reunifying families and teaching parents to be better parents as their chief goal, and it's admirable. It would seem to work for many parents. Even some parents who have spoken with us about their frustrations with the child protection system say they've learned something from forced parenting classes, for instance. Where we think there might be an issue is trying to answer the question: How do you know whether a parent has learned enough - or can do so - that they're no longer a danger to their children? In some cases we've been allowed to examine, typically after a child has died - case managers and/or judges have believed a parent has learned what he or she needs to learn, but then, tragically, the child has been killed after being sent back home.

**12:48 Virginia Black:**

Thank YOU, Henry! :)

**12:48 Henry Brunner:**

I feel instead of returning money, dedicate 1-2 judges just for child abuse cases. That way the children are not just a quick case. And we pay attention to the details.

**12:48 Comment From linda**

I'm a bit late to the discussion. Has there been any discussion or consideration on the link between child abuse and animal abuse?

12:53

**Virginia Black:**

That's a good question, Stanley, and one that we barely skimmed the surface of in reporting for this series. We know that sometimes prosecutors have been discouraged by DCS actions - most recently and publicly in the case of Tranelle Sturgis, where the family's earlier contacts with DCS had been destroyed. We also wrote a story about a boy in Marshall County where a judge returned him to his father, who had three outstanding criminal charges against him, and the judge did not seem to be aware of that. We wonder whether part of the larger discussion on how well government is protecting children should be how the parts of government should work together more closely - even though their roles and standards of proof are different. (Example: Can a child who has been returned to an allegedly abusive parent be expected to later testify against that parent in the criminal case?)

12:53

**Mary Kate Malone:**

Hi Linda. Thanks for joining. This particular series did not focus on a link between child abuse and animal abuse. However, there is a belief among law enforcement officials that those who abuse animals might be more likely to commit acts of domestic violence. That may be why there has been an emphasis placed on investigating and prosecuting cases of animal abuse and neglect locally in recent years/months.

12:53

**Comment From Stanley Phillips**

When is the issue of prosecuting cases of abuse or neglect going to get publicity? If CPS is bringing 400+ cases in a calendar year, where are the criminal convictions to keep our children safe?

12:54

**Comment From Stanley Phillips**

If i'm not mistaken, doesn't every single report of abuse or neglect automatically get forwarded to the local county prosecutor?

12:54

**Comment From Stanley Phillips**

If that Escabedo girl's father had been arrested and/or deported the first time, wouldn't it have been impossible for her to be murdered by her father?

12:55

**Comment From linda**

Thank you.

12:56

**Mary Kate Malone:**

Hi Stan. Not every single report of abuse or neglect is automatically forwarded to the prosecutor. It would first have to go to police.

12:56

**Virginia Black:**

Thank you, Linda. An interesting side note on that: We were told that two dogs were removed from the Sturgis home for neglect (before Tramelle was beaten to death), but we weren't able to find many details on that,

12:57

**Comment From linda**

This was an excellent and very informative series. I know I learned a lot, particularly how hard the professionals work on a job that never satisfies everyone.

12:58

**Virginia Black:**

Thank you!

We learned that, too. These decisions undoubtedly leave a lot of sleepless nights for people who are working so hard to try to help children.

1:00

**Comment From Linda**

I read that. If you see someone abusing an animal, you can almost guarantee that other violence is happening in that home.

1:00

**Virginia Black:**

Or at least that the potential might be there, absolutely.

1:02

**Mary Kate Malone:**

Stan, Regarding your question on Valentin Escobedo: clearly, yes, had he been arrested or deported after the first signs of possible abuse, Maya would not have been killed by him. However, according to DCS records, Valentin was never definitively linked to her first injuries; and officials indicated that they sincerely believed he was not a threat when they reunited the family.

1:02

**Comment From Anonymous**

As a survivor of gross abuse, I wish to say that I wish more people would get involved and become educated on the signs of abuse. The signs were there for my siblings and I, but were ignored by the people we thought loved us most, or should have done something. The "homes" we were sent to for safety were worse than the home we were taken from.

1:03

**Virginia Black:**

Anonymous: We're sorry to hear that. We've heard from a few other

people who have told us the same thing, or about their futile efforts to help a child they've suspected was being abused.

We do hope that if nothing else, Tramelle's death - and the other tragedies we learn of too frequently, it seems - will serve to remind people not to keep silent. We know that calls and investigated cases rose dramatically in this part of the state after his death. We hope that awareness lasts.

**1:04 Comment From jeff**

being in "the system" I felt that the law protected the female parent's rights more than the male's right did you find any evidence of this in your findings

**1:05 Comment From Debbie**

Thank you, thank you, for your research and reporting. It seems as if people want to "sweep under the rug" this [subject.We](#) need to be the voice for the kids-and without these articles, we wouldn't know what goes on. Knowledge is power- even if it's a painful subject.

**1:05 Mary Kate Malone:**

Thank you, Debbie!

**1:06 Virginia Black:**

Hi, Jeff: Actually, we have heard that quite a bit from parents over the years. We did quote a lawsuit that alleged a DCS worker told the plaintiff that in a domestic violence/CHINS case - but that seems extremely hard to quantify, or to prove.

**1:06 Comment From Linda**

We can always do a better job, and there will never be a perfect solution. I feel this series and his chat are so beneficial. I hope you will continue your efforts on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves.

**1:06 Mary Kate Malone:**

Thank you, Linda!

**1:08 Comment From Anonymous**

Jeff, Yesterday I met my 19 year old daughter for the first time. Her mother got involved in drugs and "other" activity. Her sister took custody of my daughter and eventually adopted her. DNA proved I was

her father 14 years ago, however.... it was ignored by the courts because "the father" (me) wouldn't be an influential enough figure in the child's life. That her needs would be cared for well enough by the relative taking custody of her. I wasn't even told I had a daughter until December of 2011, by my daughter who tracked me down.

**1:09 Comment From jeff**

t i thank god for my CASA worker as she did what was needed to protect my children, thank you Pat Mastough!!!!

**1:11 Virginia Black:**

Pat Mastaugh was a CASA of the year (2002, I think) for the hard work she did, and she was inspired to go to law school because of what she saw in courtrooms as a CASA. One thing we learned in doing this series is that CASAs can make such a difference in what happens in a child's case.

**1:11 Comment From Anonymous**



This is our first minute together.

**1:12 Virginia Black:**

Very nice moment! Thanks for sharing that.

**1:12 Henry Brunner:**

I think also more training needs to be given to GAL. ( guardian ad litem) do you know how they pick, or what they look for in a GAL.

**1:14 Virginia Black:**

Actually, Henry, we don't know much about that. We saw references in documents much more often to CASAs being involved; maybe because

they're volunteers and used more often.

**1:15 Comment From jeff**

I understand your situation as in my case mother was order all type of classes and cousling and never showed up for any of them, DCS never punished her and let her get away with everything even tho the kids was moved from her home ,I am the one who had limited visits, had to do couseling and be tested to see if i was a harm to the kids

**1:16 Virginia Black:**

Jeff, has your case been resolved? Did you ever have a chance to be heard in court?

**1:18 Comment From Kyle**

Thank you, Ms. Black and Ms. Malone, for this excellent series.

**1:19 Comment From Kyle**

Do you have any suggestions for how the public schools can refine and improve the role they play in child abuse prevention?

**1:19 Virginia Black:**

Jeff, it sounds as if it was eventually resolved positively. Glad to hear that. But we do think there's something to be said for the system to be more open, so that parents who find themselves in the midst of it understand better how it works.

**1:21 Virginia Black:**

Thank you, Linda! We do think there are some parts of the system that we weren't able to explore as much as we'd have liked, but we do understand it better ourselves, and we have been gratified by the response. :)

**1:25 Mary Kate Malone:**

Thanks, Kyle. Regarding your question on educating children, there is a program that the Diocese uses for its schools, called Safe Environment, which is taught at every grade level and educates children about recognizing abuse and speaking up about it. The diocese believes that it's working. Also there is recently-formed local group, called Our Hands for Humanity, which is pushing for local schools to educate children about abuse and neglect.

1:27

**Henry Brunner:**

Interesting, we were not allowed CASA. Per judge Nemeth , he turned our case into a guardianship, and he said no to CASA, DCS, CAPS.

1:27

**Virginia Black:**

Thank you all for taking the time to chat with us. If you'd like to contact us again in the future, Mary Kate' s email address is [mmalone@sbtinfo.com](mailto:mmalone@sbtinfo.com), and I can be reached at [vblack@sbtinfo.com](mailto:vblack@sbtinfo.com). Thank you for your interest!

1:28

**Mary Kate Malone:**

Thanks for chatting, everyone!

1:28

**Comment From jeff**

thank you for helping protect our children!!!