

YELLOW HIGHLIGHTS BY PRATT ON TEXAS TO SHOW POLITICAL RHETORIC MY NOTES**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:****CONTACT: WILL HOLFORD OR DICK ELLIS**

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**STRAYHORN TO REPORT FOSTER CARE DEATHS, POISONINGS, RAPES
AND PREGNANCIES TO TASK FORCE****GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION REPEATEDLY THROWS UP ROADBLOCKS AND STONEWALLS INVESTIGATION**

(AUSTIN) – Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn today released disturbing information found during her investigation into possible Medicaid prescription drug fraud and abuse about the deaths, poisonings, rapes and pregnancies of children in the state's foster care system.

“In April 2004 I said I would give our forgotten children in foster care something they need – a voice,” Strayhorn said. “I have been and I will continue to be their voice. This Governor's Health and Human Services Commission continues to stonewall my investigation and this Governor continues to hide the truth.”

“In October 2004, I urged Gov. Perry to immediately create a Family and Protective Services Crisis Management Team by executive order to finally take serious steps to save children's lives. Now it is June 2006. Gov. Perry's failure to act is unconscionable.”

[NOTE: Failure to act?: “In 2005 the Texas legislature passed, and Gov. Perry signed, SB 6 which provided comprehensive reform to the Child Protective Services (CPS) agency and addressed the concerns outlined by experts and even Carole Strayhorn's own 2004 report.]

Strayhorn found, from information provided by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, in Fiscal 2003, 30 foster children died in our state's care; in Fiscal 2004, 38 foster children died; and in Fiscal 2005, 48 foster children died.

Data shows that while the number of foster children in the state's care increased 24 percent from 26,133 in Fiscal 2003 to 32,474 in Fiscal 2005, the number of deaths increased 60 percent.

“If you compare the number of deaths of children in our state's population to the number of deaths in our state's foster care system, a child is four times more likely to die in our state's foster care system,” Strayhorn said.

Based on Fiscal 2004 data provided by the Health and Human Services Commission, about 100 children received treatment for poisoning from medications; 63 foster children received medical treatment for rape that occurred while in the foster care system; and 142 children gave birth while in the state foster care system.

“When I called on Gov. Perry in October 2004, to create a Crisis Management Team I said the crisis was minute-by-minute and child-by-child,” Strayhorn said.

In Fiscal 2004, four-year old twin boys living in the same foster home received medical treatment in the hospital for rape. A five-year old boy in the same foster home received medical treatment in the hospital for rape two days later.

A 15-year old girl who was not pregnant when she entered the state's foster care system in May 2002 gave birth in February 2004.

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“The state is supposed to be protecting our forgotten children, but in all too many cases these children are taken from one abusive situation and placed in another abusive situation,” Strayhorn said. “Many children are in more abusive situations now than they were before the state intervened. Children are being neglected, abused and are dying.”

As reported by the media, a 12-year-old boy died in December 2005, while in the state’s care at a facility that treats children with learning disabilities and emotional problems. The boy suffocated while being restrained from behind by an employee of the facility. Another boy in the state’s care at the same facility died May 30, after drowning in a creek during a May 6 bicycle outing.

A three-year old was treated for poisoning from an atypical, mind-altering antipsychotic drug. These drugs are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration for children under the age of 18 years old.

“Gov. Perry’s failure to create a Crisis Management Team is unconscionable,” Strayhorn said. “The crisis is minute-by-minute and child-by-child. I renew my call. He must act now to save children’s lives.”

Strayhorn discovered the alarming number of deaths, poisonings, rapes and pregnancies while conducting her investigation into potential prescription drug fraud and abuse in the state’s foster care system. Strayhorn launched her investigation in November 2004, after her report, *Forgotten Children*, uncovered the fact that large numbers of psychotropic drugs are being prescribed to children in the foster care system, even though, according to the FDA, some of these drugs are not approved for children and have serious side effects such as suicidal tendencies, diabetes, and cardiac arrhythmia.

“Since that time, repeated and continuing roadblocks and stonewalling have been encountered by me and my staff in attempting to secure basic and necessary data from the Health and Human Services Commission [NOTE: Not Gov. Perry’s Office],” Strayhorn said. “It has been 19 months and 25 letters, emails, meetings and phone calls since I first requested foster care and corresponding Medicaid data from HHSC. The Commission finally provided Fiscal 2004 data. But, 10 months into Fiscal 2006, we have yet to receive the Fiscal 2005 data, which we know has been available for months and months.

“In March 2006, I requested all of the same data for Fiscal 2005. Claiming confidentiality, the Commission to this day refuses to cooperate and provide the Fiscal 2005 data needed to complete my investigation, despite that the statute requires that they cooperate and the Court of Appeals ruled on June 16 that HHSC’s view about the confidentiality of its records is clearly wrong. [NOTE: the appeals court ruling on the Federal privacy rules was just this month so under the old rules being followed they were correct in not giving her the data.]

“What I have found from the information that was made available should be and is of grave concern, but the picture painted by Gov. Perry’s Health and Human Services Commission’s secret 2005 [NOTE: same as the Democrats in D.C. calling every Federal agency “Bush’s xxx office” when it is really just the standard bureaucracy.] data must paint an even grimmer picture on all fronts,” Strayhorn said. “The people of Texas can handle the truth. What they will not tolerate is this Governor’s callous indifference in hiding the truth and placing our forgotten children at high risk.”

Strayhorn said her findings will be reported Thursday, June 29, to the Medicaid and Public Assistance Fraud Oversight Task Force so there will be a public record of this neglect and abuse.

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“With every breath of air in Carole Keeton Strayhorn’s lungs, I will continue to be the voice for these forgotten, neglected, abused, and dead children,” Strayhorn said. **[NOTE: Come on, then why wait to raise public alarm with this type of language when she claims she’s known of problems for several years!?!]**

“There should have been a Crisis Management Team put into action in October 2004. It must be put in action now to prevent any more neglect, abuse and deaths of our more than 32,000 children in our state’s foster care system.

“Gov. Perry is hiding the truth. And in hiding the truth he is jeopardizing our forgotten children’s lives. That makes me one heartbroken Grandma.”

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GOVERNOR PERRY’S STATEMENT ON THIS MATTER:

“In 2005 the Texas legislature passed, and Gov. Perry signed, SB 6 which provided comprehensive reform to the Child Protective Services (CPS) agency and addressed the concerns outlined by experts and even Carole Strayhorn’s own 2004 report. With her support evaporating, her poll numbers dropping and her campaign stagnating, Carole Strayhorn seems desperate to change the subject and is sadly not above exploiting child tragedies to do it. What a despicable thing to do.”