**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND SECTION 63‑7‑940(A) OF THE 1976 CODE, RELATING TO AUTHORIZED USES OF UNFOUNDED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORTS, TO AUTHORIZE THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD FATALITIES OR NEAR FATALITIES; TO AMEND SECTION 63‑7‑1990(H) OF THE 1976 CODE, RELATING TO THE CONFIDENTIALITY AND RELEASE OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT RECORDS, TO AUTHORIZE THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD FATALITIES OR NEAR FATALITIES; AND TO DEFINE NECESSARY TERMS.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Section 63‑7‑940(A) of the 1976 Code is amended by adding an appropriately numbered new item at the end to read:

“( )(a) the state director or the director’s designee may publicly disclose findings or information about an unfounded case of child abuse or neglect, the circumstances of which resulted in a child fatality or near fatality, provided that the disclosed information is limited to the following:

(i) the cause and circumstances regarding the child fatality or near fatality;

(ii) the age and gender of the child;

(iii) information describing any previous reports of child abuse or neglect that are pertinent to the abuse or neglect that led to the child fatality or near fatality;

(iv) information describing any previous investigations pertinent to the abuse or neglect that led to the child fatality or near fatality;

(v) the result of any such investigations; and

(vi) the services provided by the State and actions of the State on behalf of the child that are pertinent to the child abuse or neglect that led to the child fatality or near fatality.

(b) The department may delay public disclosure of findings or information pursuant to this item if the disclosure of the findings or information would threaten the safety or well‑being of a child or the child’s family, or if disclosure of the findings or information would impede a criminal investigation or endanger a reporter of abuse or neglect.”

SECTION 2. Section 63‑7‑1990(H) of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“(H)(1) The state director or the director’s designee is authorized to prepare and release reports of the results of the department’s investigations into the ~~deaths~~ fatalities or near fatalities of children, ~~in its custody or receiving child welfare services at the time of death~~ provided that the disclosed information is limited to the following:

(a) the cause and circumstances regarding the child fatality or near fatality;

(b) the age and gender of the child;

(c) information describing any previous reports of child abuse or neglect that are pertinent to the abuse or neglect that led to the child fatality or near fatality;

(d) information describing any previous investigations pertinent to the abuse or neglect that led to the child fatality or near fatality;

(e) the result of any such investigations; and

(f) the services provided by the State and actions of the State on behalf of the child that are pertinent to the child abuse or neglect that led to the child fatality or near fatality.

(2) The department may delay public disclosure of a report pursuant to this subsection if the disclosure of the report would threaten the safety or well‑being of a child or the child’s family, or if disclosure of the report would impede a criminal investigation or endanger a reporter of abuse or neglect.”

SECTION 3. Section 63‑7‑20 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding an appropriately numbered new item to read:

“( ) ‘Near fatality’ means an act that, as certified by a physician, places a child in serious or critical condition.”

SECTION 4. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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