

KATE BROWNING NEWS

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County Legislator, 3rd District
Health and Human Services, Chair

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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CHILD'S DEATH UNDER CARE OF SUFFOLK COUNTY REQUIRES ANSWERS *BROWNING AND AUTISM UNITED CALL FOR RELEASE OF RECORDS AND INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION*

Hauppauge, NY- On April 2, 2009 Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) was joined by representatives from Autism United and the Jonathan Carey Foundation to call for a full investigation into the death of Annie Brown. Annie was a 17 year old developmentally disabled girl who was autistic and severely mentally retarded, and had been a ward of Suffolk County since her mother's death in 2005.

Annie had been placed in a state certified Glen Cove facility being run by SCO Family of Services, which is a non-profit organization that cares for developmentally disabled children. On March 17, 2009 the child became ill and was taken to the hospital. Surgery was performed, but she died from her condition on March 18 due to sepsis caused by a perforated colon. Although gastro-intestinal issues have been recognized as a common issue associated with autism, this type of condition is not normally seen in individuals under the age of 40. The autopsy report concluded Annie died of natural causes, but this report and her medical records have yet to be released. Annie Brown was non-communicable because of her disability, which makes it more difficult to know if something was wrong early on.

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services will be conducting an investigation of its own, but Executive Director John Gilmore of Autism United is calling for an independent investigation, and Michael Carey, founder of the Jonathan Carey Foundation is calling for tougher regulations to be implemented. The Jonathan Carey Foundation was founded after the death of Jonathan Carey, who was an autistic child with severe mental retardation that was killed from abuse at a state run facility for developmentally disabled children. Jonathan's Law was passed in 2007, which requires the state to provide information to parents or legal guardians when their children are being cared for at a state facility.

"I am calling for the release of Annie's medical records and the autopsy report," stated Legislator Browning. "I also want to see our health department conduct an investigation into the medical treatment provided to Annie leading up to her death. Her medical condition was well known, and we want to make sure she received the care she needed for that condition."

Legislator Browning has been a strong advocate for the need to reform the New York State Social Services System. She has passed several pieces of legislation over the last three years that create stricter regulations for facilities funded by the Department of Social Services, and how much money can be applied to facilities that are run as residential homes. State officials have recently introduced versions of these laws in the New York State Assembly, but none have passed through the various state committees that must approve them.

"We need major reform of the system," concluded Browning. "Inspectors need to be given more autonomy, and money needs to be accounted for. There are so many facilities operating without a license in unsafe conditions. Our quality of life and the safety of individuals are at stake here. We can no longer turn a blind eye to these problems."

Legislator Browning is not insinuating that any foul play took place at the SCP Family of Services Facility. However, without full transparency regarding the investigation, and without all records being released to the public she will continue to ask for answers.

Since the time this press conference was held, Commissioner Janet DeMarzo from Suffolk County's Department of Social Services requested that the Nassau County Medical Examiner expedite the release of Annie Brown's autopsy report. The Commissioner also contacted the County Attorney and preliminary discussions revealed that Annie's records can be made public.