



News from the Office of

ADAM BELLO

MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Monroe County hires the Bonadio Group to monitor Child Protective Services

The consulting firm will review the county's Child Protective Services practices and procedures and make recommendations for continued, sustainable improvements.

Monroe County Executive Adam Bello and Deputy County Executive for Health and Human Services Corinda Crossdale today announced that the county has hired consulting firm The Bonadio Group to monitor and perform a systemic review of the county's Child Protective Services division.

"One of the fundamental responsibilities of any community is to protect and care for its children. And as public servants – whether through our Departments of Human Services, Public Safety, or Public Health – that responsibility means we are putting in safeguards that ensure their safety," said Bello. "Going forward, it is imperative that the dedicated women and men of our Child Protective Services unit have all the resources they need to continue the challenging work of protecting children at their most defenseless and supporting and strengthening families in their most difficult moments."

The need for a CPS monitor was first identified by the state Office of Children and Family Services in 2018, but the recommendation was put off by the prior county administration.

The Child Protective Services unit has been strained as far back as 2015, when OCFS found 13 regulatory and statutory deficiencies with CPS that resulted in a Program Improvement Plan for Monroe County. This came amid a significant rise in reported instances of child abuse and neglect and workforce reductions that led to burdensome investigator caseload sizes and high staff turnover.

In 2017, following a series of tragic, high-profile fatalities involving children, the previous county administration began efforts to grapple with these issues by boosting staff numbers, providing investigators with new, more efficient technology and improving training programs.

Since that time, and through the hard work of its dedicated staff, CPS has made significant improvements: caseload sizes are down, there are fewer overdue cases and more investigations are being completed within the regulatory guidelines.

“As they have faced down mounting challenges over the past few years, CPS staff has done yeoman’s work,” said Crossdale. “They have made significant progress, real progress, quality progress that is not about just improving numbers, but is about better serving this community’s children and families.”

However, state regulators are still concerned that those improvements may not be sustainable in the long term without a more comprehensive examination of the department’s operations. Monroe County is now welcoming the monitor that has been recommended and resisted since 2018.

“I embrace the opportunity to tackle this issue head-on and welcome the monitoring resources The Bonadio Group will bring to our child welfare system,” said Bello. “I look forward to their recommendations and know that their work will help us ensure sustainable, lasting change so we can better meet our profound responsibility to help keep children safe.”

Under the terms of a one-year contract, Bonadio consultants will work in partnership with the state Office of Children and Family Services to provide an independent review, evaluation and assessment of all policies, procedures and practices relating to Monroe County Department of Social Services division of Child Protective and Preventive Services. Bonadio will have full and unrestricted access to all personnel and documentation produced or held by DSS and the agencies it contracts with for preventive or other services.

“This is not about a numbers game,” said Crossdale. “This is not about changing practices and procedures to meet arbitrary goals. This is about protecting children and families and about providing the resources and support our workers need so they can do the job they want to do.”

Bonadio began its work in January. It is expected the state will reimburse the county up to 62% of the \$224,000 cost for monitoring services. The monitor will remain in place until released by OCFS.