

Meeting of the  
**Intentional Death  
Prevention Committee**  
of the  
North Carolina Child  
Fatality Task Force

October 17, 2022

# Child Fatality Task Force




***Our Children, Our Future,  
Our RESPONSIBILITY***

# Roll Call Attendance & Approval of Minutes



Minutes from last meeting on 9-19-22 have been posted on the CFTF website, the minutes have been sent out and the link to the minutes is also on your agenda.

# Today's Agenda

- Continuation of committee discussion on youth mental health
  - Updates and discussion on administrative item addressing child abuse and neglect reporting training for professionals
  - Discussion of carry-over and State Team recommendation on comprehensive toxicology testing in Medical Examiner child deaths
  - Updates and discussion of carry-over recommendation to strengthen infant safe surrender law
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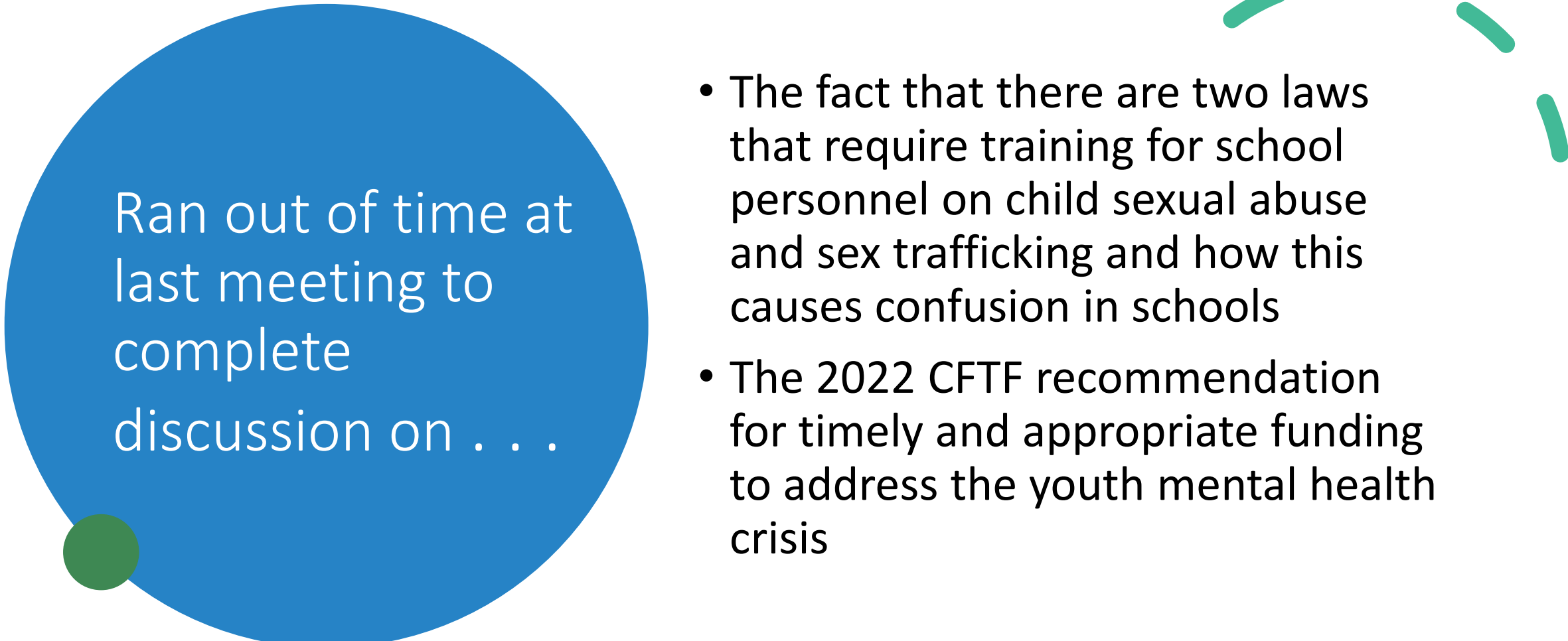


Continuation of discussion on  
youth mental health

Recommendations made by this committee at the September meeting on youth mental health (both legislative) to be submitted to full CFTF


- Support recurring funds to increase numbers of school nurses, social workers, counselors and psychologists to support the physical and mental health of students and to move North Carolina toward achieving nationally recommended ratios for these professional positions in schools; funding at least sufficient to sustain current positions whether sourced through temporary or permanent funding
- Support funding sufficient to sustain implementation and continued use of a statewide school health data system beginning in 2024

*[Also related to this topic a recommendation from CFTF UD committee to launch and fund a statewide firearm safe storage education and awareness initiative]*




Ran out of time at  
last meeting to  
complete  
discussion on . . .

- The fact that there are two laws that require training for school personnel on child sexual abuse and sex trafficking and how this causes confusion in schools
- The 2022 CFTF recommendation for timely and appropriate funding to address the youth mental health crisis



Updates and discussion on administrative item addressing child abuse and neglect reporting training for professionals

*2022: Administrative support to continue to strengthen education and awareness surrounding child abuse and neglect reporting for law enforcement professionals, medical professionals, and school professionals, such efforts to include adding child abuse and neglect reporting training to already mandated training for all three professions and for trainings to include trauma-informed response and prevention.*



## Reminder on the importance of this topic comes from the report of the 2016 National Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse & Neglect Fatalities

- ***A prior report to CPS, regardless of its disposition, was the single strongest predictor of a child's potential risk for injury death (intentional or unintentional) before age 5.***
- *Given the same risk factors, a child reported to CPS had about a two-and-a-half times greater risk of any injury death.*
- *Children with a prior CPS report had an almost six (5.8) times greater risk of death from intentional injuries.*
- *A child with a prior report of physical abuse had a risk of intentional injury death that was five times greater than a child reported for neglect.*
- *Children reported for neglect had a significantly higher risk of unintentional injury death.*
- *Risk of sleep-related death was about three-and-a-half times greater when there had been a previous report of child abuse or neglect.*

[Findings from a population-level study based on multiple sources of data from California on risk factors for fatal child maltreatment. The full report of the Commission is available at: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cecanf\\_final\\_report.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cecanf_final_report.pdf).]

# Background on CFTF work with Child Abuse & Neglect (CAN) Reporting

- **State Child Fatality Prevention Team** which reviews child deaths has reported continued challenges with child abuse and neglect reporting and recommended to the CFTF continued focus on strengthening education and awareness around child abuse and neglect reporting. (The State Team has repeated this recommendation to the CFTF for several years.)
- **During the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 CFTF study cycles, CAN reporting was a major issue of focus for the ID Committee** who looked at:
  - The laws and systems surrounding reporting in NC
  - Data on CAN reports
  - NC challenges with reporting
  - Research on CAN reporting and what could be learned from other states
  - Potential actions to address CAN reporting
- **CFTF has had administrative recommendations from 2019 to 2022 that have focused on strengthening CAN reporting public education and awareness and training on this topic for professionals** (law enforcement, healthcare, school)

Progress made with CFTF administrative recommendations in 2020, 2021, 2022 to strengthen child abuse and neglect (CAN) reporting education and awareness for public and training for professionals +

### Public education and awareness efforts following CFTF 2020 admin recommendation


- **Led by NC DSS and Prevent Child Abuse NC** who made great progress in improving online information about reporting in NC and strengthening existing online trainings, resources, and use of social media to educate

### Efforts with training law enforcement following CFTF 2021 & 2022 admin recommendation


- **CFTF efforts led to a determination to include this topic in in-service training for law enforcement** in its 2023 training curriculum; 4-hour juvenile block with two hours devoted to this topic.
- **NC DSS worked with Whitney Belich** (Child Abuse Resource Prosecutor) and other relevant experts to lead development of this training.
- **UPDATE TODAY FROM WHITNEY BELICH**

### Efforts with training healthcare providers following CFTF 2021 & 2022 admin recommendation:

- **CFTF efforts have led to initial steps to develop a training for healthcare providers** that can be offered in various formats including video, in person, and materials for distribution.
- **The NC Pediatric Society's CCAN committee is leading** this development via input from its member healthcare providers who have expertise in child abuse and neglect as well as input from **NC DSS, NC's Child Abuse Resource Prosecutor, Prevent Child Abuse NC, etc.**
- **UPDATE TODAY FROM DR. MOLLY BERKOFF**




Committee discussion on child  
abuse & neglect reporting:  
any potential actions?



Carry-over and  
State Team  
recommendation  
on comprehensive  
toxicology testing in  
Medical Examiner  
child deaths

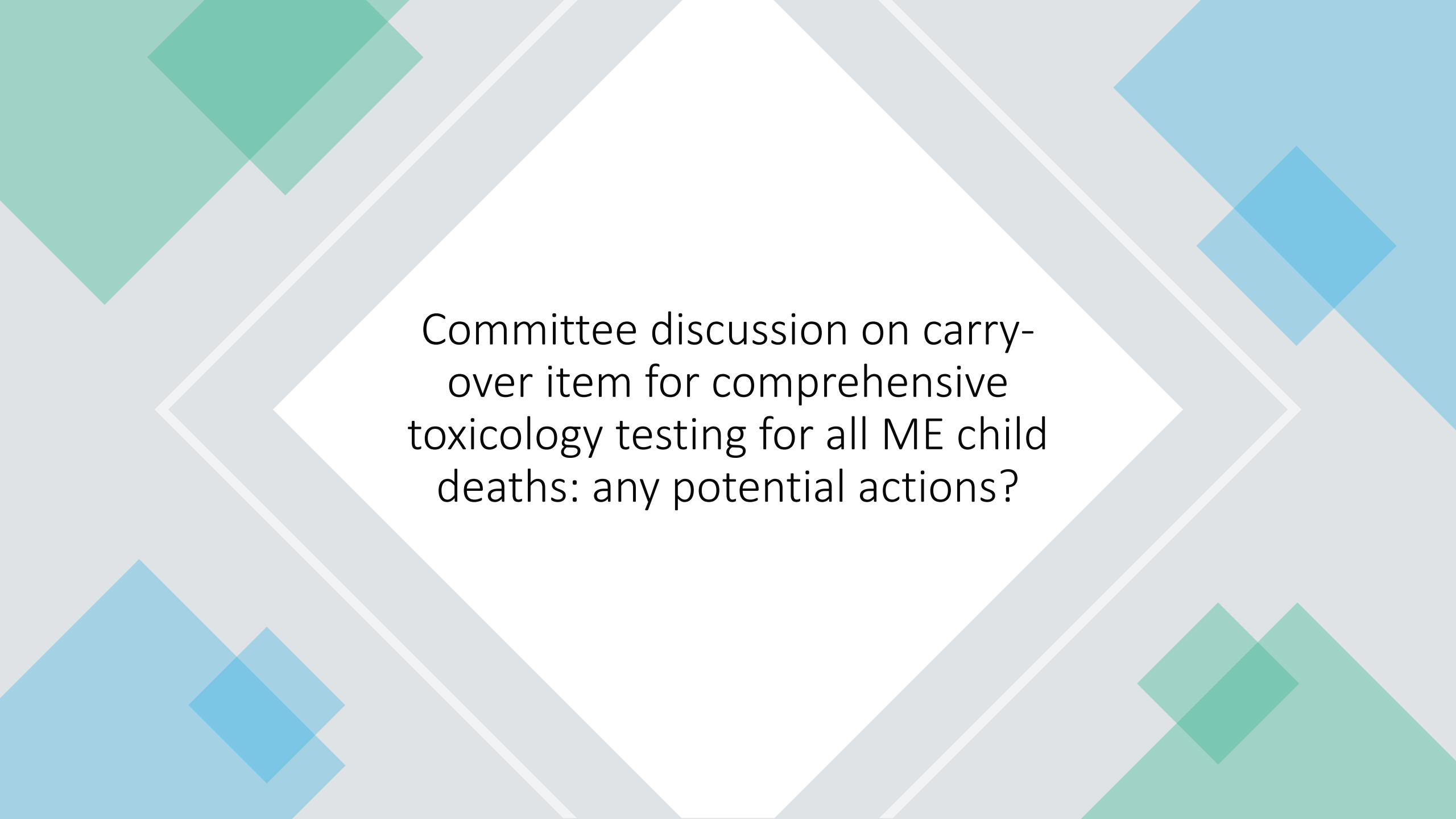
2022 recommendation:

*SUPPORT an appropriation of \$550,000 in nonrecurring funds and \$110,000 in recurring funds to enable the OCME to conduct comprehensive toxicology testing in all Medical Examiner jurisdiction child deaths.*

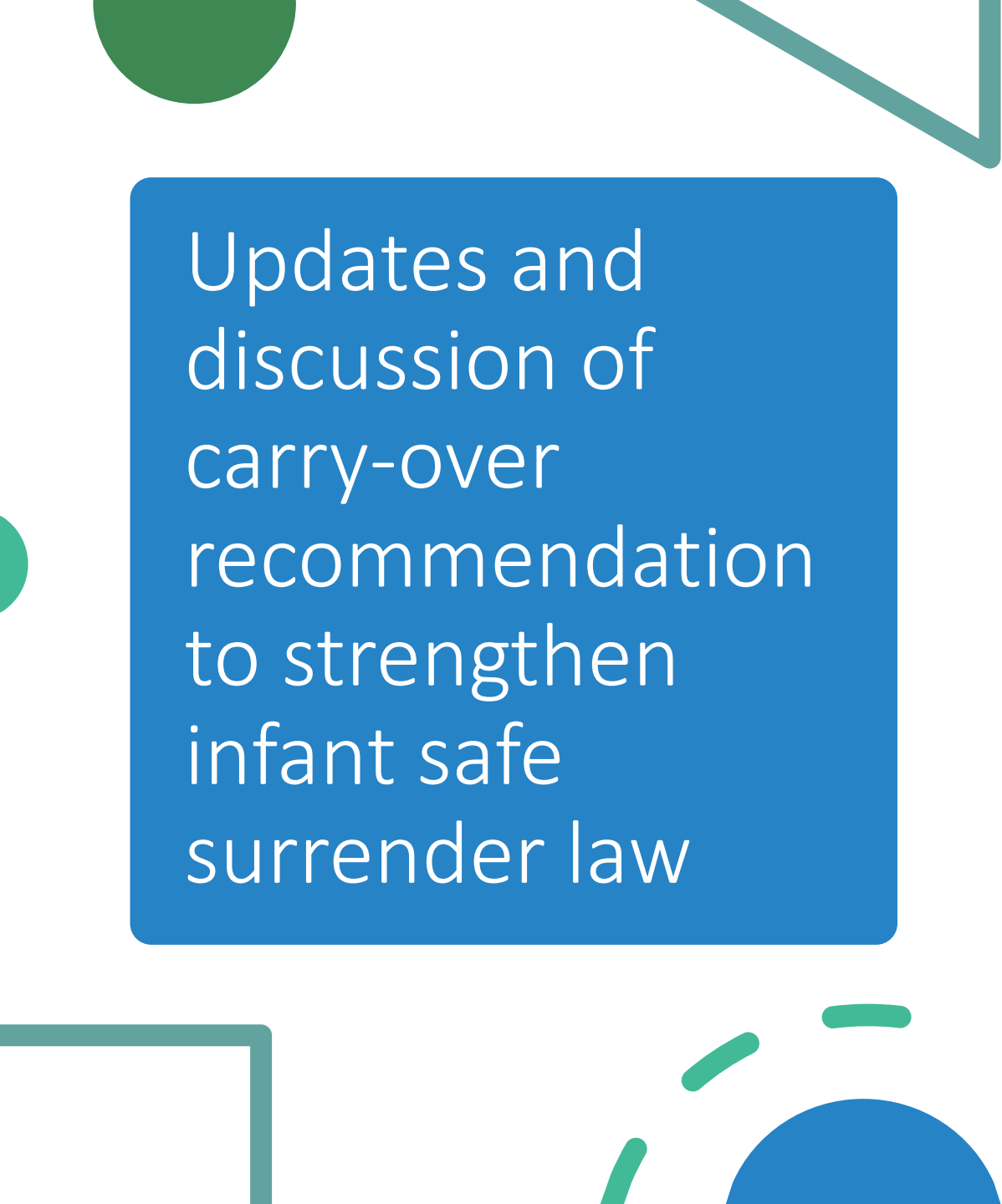


# Highlights of information previously presented

- Currently, the NC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner does not have the necessary resources to conduct comprehensive toxicology screening in all child deaths under their jurisdiction.
- Without comprehensive toxicology testing, there may be missed opportunities to determine contributing factors to a fatality.
- A comprehensive and complete toxicology report has value to a variety of stakeholders including families, public safety officials, legal representatives, insurers, etc., beyond the certifying toxicologist and pathologist.
- Comprehensive toxicology testing can identify information related to a child's death that helps to explain more about the circumstances of the death that may be relevant to inform strategies for the prevention of deaths and injuries.



Committee discussion on carry-over item for comprehensive toxicology testing for all ME child deaths: any potential actions?



Updates and discussion of carry-over recommendation to strengthen infant safe surrender law

## 2022 recommendation

**SUPPORT** legislation to strengthen the infant safe surrender law to make it more likely the law will be used in circumstances for which it was intended to protect a newborn infant at risk of abandonment or harm by making legislative changes to accomplish the following:

- 1) remove “any adult” from those designated to accept a surrendered infant;
- 2) provide information to a surrendering parent;
- 3) strengthen protection of a surrendering parent’s identity;
- 4) incorporate steps to help ensure the law is only applied when criteria are met.

# Background on CFTF & Safe Surrender

- In 2001 North Carolina passed S.L. 2001-291 known by many as the “Infant Safe Surrender” law. This law was originally recommended and advanced by the NC Child Fatality Task Force.
- Infant safe surrender or “safe haven” laws exist in every state and are designed to provide a safe alternative for a desperate parent of a newborn who may be tempted to engage in actions harmful to the infant.
- In recent years the Child Fatality Task Force, with input from experts in juvenile law, examined the Safe Surrender law and developed the four areas of recommended changes to strengthen the law.
- HB 473 addressed the recommendations, passed the House unanimously in 2021, Senate did not take it up even though there was a nearly identical Senate bill

# Refresher: reasons for recommended changes

## 1. Why remove “any adult” from those designated to accept a surrendered infant?

Currently, the law requires four categories of professionals to accept a safely surrendered infant and says also that “any adult” “may” accept a safely surrendered infant. However, **“any adult” cannot be trained** about the requirements of the law nor can “any adult” be expected to provide accurate information about the law to a surrendering parent. There are also **concerns about human trafficking and unlawful custody transfer** when “any adult” may claim an infant was surrendered to him or her pursuant to the law. This kind of “any adult” category is not typical in other states.

## 2. Why provide information to a surrendering parent?


**Currently, no information is required to be provided to the surrendering parent.** If and when information may be provided, there is no means for ensuring accuracy, consistency, or quality of that information. When possible, surrendering parents should be given accurate information regarding consequences, rights, and options related to safe surrender.

## 3. Why strengthen protection of surrendering parent’s identity?


Even though a surrendering parent in North Carolina does not have to give his or her identity at the moment of surrender, current law requires the Division of Social Services (DSS) to treat the case the same as any other abuse, neglect, or dependency case once they receive custody – this includes making immediate diligent efforts to identify and locate the surrendering parent for participation in all juvenile proceedings regarding the infant. **Protections of a surrendering parent’s identity are a critical aspect of safe surrender/safe haven laws in general**, as a parent who believes that his or her identity has protections related to safe surrender may be more likely to use the law in circumstances for which it was intended— to protect a newborn infant at risk of abandonment or harm. Many other states have stronger protections for the identity of a surrendering parent, and there are different statutory changes that could accomplish strengthening these protections without changing a non-surrendering parent’s rights.

## 4. Why incorporate steps to help ensure law is only applied when criteria are met?

Safe surrender laws should be strengthened to ensure that safe surrender protections are only applied when criteria set out in law are met because the law provides protections for a surrendering parent with respect to immunity and identity.



Committee discussion on  
carry-over item to strengthen  
infant safe surrender law: any  
potential actions?

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Concluding comments,  
announcements, &  
adjourn