JESSIE RODRIGUEZ
STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 21ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Assembly Republicans, Rep. Rodriguez Disheartened by Political Games

MADISON – State Representative Jessie Rodriguez (R-Oak Creek), chair of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families, is disheartened by the actions of Democratic members of the committee who used today's hearing to play political games instead of focusing on the welfare of children.

2009 Wisconsin Act 78 requires a hearing by the legislative standing committee no less than annually on three types of reports: 90-day Summary Reports for Child Deaths, Serious Injuries, or Egregious Abuse or Neglect Incidents; Quarterly Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children in Out-of-Home Care Placement; and the Annual Report of Sexual Abuse of Children in Out-of-Home Care Placement.

Today's hearing was also noticed to review the Annual Child Abuse and Neglect Report for 2014, which was released on December 30, 2015. The notice for today's hearing was sent to committee members and publicly noticed on Wednesday, February 17, 2016. A day later, committee members received copies of the specific reports that were publicly noticed on today's agenda.

Rep. Rodriguez said, "Committee members were aware of the agenda a full week prior to the hearing, and had ample time to contact the chair and request items be added to the agenda. None of the democratic members of the committee contacted me or my office to request a discussion of the incidents at Lincoln Hills be added to the agenda."

"The open meetings law requires that public notice be given of the agenda for a meeting, so that legislators and the public are aware of the topics being discussed at a public hearing," commented Rep. Samantha Kerkman. "We are all concerned about the safety of our children residing in juvenile facilities, but it is a shame to have my colleagues on the other side of the aisle try to score political points from these incidents."

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Rep. Rob Brooks said, "It has become abundantly clear to me that certain representatives continually use tragedies like Lincoln Hills to make political statements rather than looking for long-term solutions. Committee members and the public as a whole have just recently been made aware of the abuses occurring at Lincoln Hills and there remains an open investigation by the FBI. We need to let law enforcement do its job and when a final report is issued with all of the facts, then and only then, should legislators make suggested policy and funding changes. I believe there is little to be gained by making decisions absent of all the facts."

"As chair of the Children and Families Committee, I am concerned about the safety and well-being of all our children and based on these allegations of abuse, further investigation is warranted. The Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation and Federal Bureau of Investigation are conducting an in-depth investigation at this time. I am committed to following the investigation, and holding a future hearing at the appropriate time," Rep. Rodriguez concluded.

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