

MARK
RONCHETTI
✦ GOVERNOR ✦

The Mark Ronchetti Children, Youth, & Families Department Plan: Putting Child Safety First.

1. Put Child Safety First

Mark Ronchetti will change the philosophy at CYFD by putting child safety first. Under the status quo, the safety and well-being of the child takes a backseat to the rights of the abusers. Over the last few years, CYFD's focus on keeping families together has too often resulted in children being repeatedly put back into abusive situations. While the goal should always be to keep families together, that must change when a vulnerable child is being abused.

2. Create Independent Child Protection Division

Mark Ronchetti will create an independent Child Protection Division. This division will be tasked with assessing and investigating child abuse and neglect cases. This division will be staffed with highly trained child advocates. This reform will create a wall between those social workers at CYFD tasked with assisting families and those assessing abuse and neglect situations and making legal determinations.

This department will also ensure that there is better partnership with law enforcement agencies throughout the state.

This department will also be tasked with reviewing cases in which there have been multiple CYFD referrals to ensure no child falls between the cracks.



3. Strengthen Child Abuse Laws

Mark Ronchetti will have a zero tolerance policy for child abuse. Convictions for child abuse will lead to swift and sure punishments. Those accused of felony child abuse will not be eligible for parole and convictions will lead to mandatory prison sentences.

The Lujan Grisham administration weakened child abuse laws by no longer considering exposing a newborn child to drugs as a trigger for an abuse/neglect investigation. Mark Ronchetti will repeal this dangerous law. Ronchetti will require that Child Protection Division be notified whenever a newborn child is exposed to illegal drugs.

Mark will repeal the “differential response” law enacted by Governor Lujan Grisham that ended the requirement that all child abuse calls be investigated.

A recent Harvard University study found “differential response” to be an extremely dangerous and wrong-headed policy.*

*Elizabeth Bartholet, *Differential Response: A Dangerous Experiment in Child Welfare*.
<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/12694222>

4. Increase Transparency

Under Governor Lujan Grisham, CYFD has repeatedly been caught operating in secrecy to protect the governor politically. They have been caught deleting public records, operating on secret texting apps to hide their communications from the public, and are now being sued for coverups.

That will change under Mark Ronchetti. Under the Ronchetti administration, CYFD will publish reports and data on a routine basis, particularly reports from the new independent watchdog. Similarly, all IPRA's and responses will be made available to the public on a website portal.

5. Independent Watchdog Ombudsman for Increased Oversight

Mark Ronchetti will create an Ombudsman for CYFD that will be independent of the department. Under the Lujan Grisham administration, there has been a culture of intimidation and retaliation that has resulted in critical problems not being addressed and corrected. In fact, the governor is currently being sued for firing a CYFD whistleblower.

This new watchdog will review departmental actions, conduct investigations, and make recommendations. It will be impartial, independent, credible, and accessible. This ombudsman will serve a 6-year term to insulate it from politics and create stability.

6. Addressing Mental Health

There is a shortage of mental health services in New Mexico for both children and adults. This has been exacerbated by the governor's extended and unnecessary lockdowns and isolation of children.

The Ronchetti administration will improve access to mental health services by incentivizing mental health professionals to come to New Mexico, while providing mental health services to children in need.

7. Prevention

Drug treatment services must be a priority. The majority of child abuse cases involve addiction issues and Mark Ronchetti will ensure that more drug treatment options are available to those dealing with addiction.

- Ensure at-risk families are connected to critical services, such as child care, mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and health care services.
- Provide wrap-around services for at-risk families to ensure they are connected to all the services they need.

8. Foster Parents

Foster parents, resource families, and grandparents serve a critical role and deserve far more support from the state than they currently receive.

- The current "us vs. them" culture at CYFD must change to a "we're all in this together" philosophy.
- Foster parents should be evaluated in a fair and transparent manner.
- CYFD must be more forthcoming and honest in sharing information about children and their situations.



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