

Domingo, 19 de Febrero de 2006

The Administration for Children's Services and Hispanic Families

John B. Mattingly

Keeping children safe is the most important thing we do at the Administration for Children's Services. It is our responsibility to investigate all reports of abuse and neglect. To keep children safe by strengthening their families, we can provide help with mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse, child care, parenting and housekeeping. If a child is in imminent danger, we may have to remove the child from the home and place him or her in foster care. If a parent can be safely reunited with their child, we will provide services to help them do so.

We are working hard to improve our services to immigrant and non-English-speaking New Yorkers. We firmly believe that every family has a right to help in their own language. We need to be able to communicate with families not only in English, but in Spanish and other languages. If you or a neighbor or a friend becomes involved with Children's Services, you should know that we provide interpreters for every interaction with ACS. You should **not** have to rely on a child or other family member to interpret for you. Soon, we will have a system in place so that our child protective workers will have cell phones and be able to get a translator on the phone immediately.

It's also important that you know that your immigration status does not bar you from getting services to help you safely care for your children. ACS's child welfare services are provided to all children and families without regard to immigration status. We provide housing assistance and other help to every New Yorker. If your child is in foster care, your immigration status will not be used against you when the decision is made whether or not you are able to be safely reunited with your children. Additionally, we only request immigration status of a family member to help us find the most appropriate resources and services, and that it is not reported to immigration authorities. We have an Office of Immigrant Services available to help you with these needs.

We realize that the child welfare system can be difficult to understand for many families, particularly for immigrant and non-English-speaking families. We want to expand our Parents as Partners program so that Latino families who have been through the child welfare system can help other families. We are also making it a priority to hire bilingual staff, and we strongly encourage Latinos to consider child welfare as a profession.

There's another very important way you can help us to help children: We need more Latino families to volunteer to become foster families and adoptive families. You can be a foster or adoptive family regardless of your immigration status. Please call 212/676-WISH. The best way to make a difference for all of New York City's children is to make a difference in the life of just one child.

We plan to hold community forums in neighborhoods throughout the City so that families can meet Children's Service leaders, ask questions, and discuss issues of importance to those neighborhoods. We also want to work with churches and other faith-based organizations. Please invite us to come and talk and meet with your group. We'd be happy to do so.

As Commissioner, it is my job to keep New York City's children safe – but neither I, nor ACS, can do it alone. We rely on everyone who comes into contact with children to be part of the chain of protection. We need the Latino community to help us to identify families in crisis before children experience any harm. If you feel a child may be the subject of physical abuse or neglect, we ask you to call 311 (or 911 in an emergency). If you are reluctant to make a call because you think it is wrong to interfere in another family's private life, or because you're hoping things will just get better on their own, please remember that a child's life may be at stake. A child can be badly hurt – or worse – in a very short time.

I welcome your thoughts on how we can do a better job of keeping our children safe. You can send me an email by visiting the Children's Services website, located at www.nyc.gov/acs, and following the appropriate links. Working together, we can keep New York City's children safe.