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Leader of Child Agency in New Jersey Resigns

By [TINA KELLEY](#)

After two years of leading court-ordered reforms to [New Jersey's](#) embattled child welfare system, the commissioner of the State Department of Children and Families announced his resignation on Thursday.

The commissioner, Kevin M. Ryan, helped the newly created agency complete a record number of adoptions, and he oversaw a fourfold increase in the number of new foster families, as well as other requirements of the settlement of a federal class action lawsuit brought against the state after several highly publicized instances of child abuse in 2003.

Mr. Ryan, 41, a former child advocate for the state, said he planned to continue as commissioner through the end of February and to begin working in March at the Amelior and MCJ Foundations, which serve impoverished children in Newark and Africa. The foundations have offices in Newark and Morristown, and are led by Raymond G. Chambers, a businessman and philanthropist known for helping to found the Points of Light Foundation, a nonprofit that encourages volunteer efforts.

In his resignation letter and in an interview, Mr. Ryan did not disclose his reason for leaving, but child advocates who have spoken with him said that his family's financial needs played a role. Mr. Ryan is married and has six children. His salary as commissioner was \$141,000. He declined to disclose what his new salary would be.

In his letter, Mr. Ryan thanked Gov. [Jon S. Corzine](#) for his commitment to the state's children. The governor and the State Legislature created the Department of Children and Families in 2006, breaking it off from the Department of Human Services. Mr. Ryan was the department's first commissioner.

"I have enormous confidence that the leadership team and field staff here at D.C.F. will carry on these efforts with community leaders with the same focus and skill they have exhibited repeatedly," Mr. Ryan's letter said. The department has 7,000 employees and an annual budget of \$1.5 billion.

Lilo H. Stainton, Mr. Corzine's press secretary, said the governor would be looking for a highly qualified replacement as soon as possible. "This is a real priority on his agenda," she said. Speaking of Mr. Ryan, she added, "It will be important, moving forward, to build on all the work he's done."

Several advocates for children reacted with dismay to the announcement of Mr. Ryan's departure. He is the third leader of the state's child welfare system to leave office in the last four years.

Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, a Manhattan advocacy group that brought the federal lawsuit on behalf of foster children in New Jersey, said she was very troubled by the resignation.

"It's really unfortunate to lose the leadership at this particularly critical stage of the reform movement," she said. "This is the first stage of the reform effort, and it's only going to get more difficult."

Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, credited Mr. Ryan with bringing order to chaos and said she was worried about how his departure would affect the reforms.

"I hope the position is filled quickly," she said. "This is not a time to have a gap in leadership. There is still a lot of work to do."