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# NJ child welfare chief, Kevin Ryan, resigning

by Susan K. Livio/The Star-Ledger

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Kevin Ryan, commissioner of the state Department of Children and Families, is expected to announce his resignation today, two years after Gov. Jon Corzine tapped him to salvage the floundering effort to reform New Jersey's child welfare system.



Ed Murray/The

Star-LedgerGov. Jon Corzine signs a bill into law creating the Department of Children and Families and names Kevin Ryan, right, acting commissioner in September 2006. A look back: [Child Advocate moves deeper into fray](#) Ryan's appointment - coupled with the creation of a department dedicated to family issues - helped Corzine avert a legal battle with Children's Rights, a national advocacy group that had petitioned a federal judge to take over the Division of Youth and Family Services.

After two favorable reports from a court monitor overseeing the overhaul of its child welfare agency, Ryan said it's time to leave. "I have a lot of confidence in Jon Corzine's commitment to this child welfare reform effort," Ryan told The Star-Ledger. "I've seen first hand the strong work of the reform team over the last two years, and together that's a winning combination that can continue to succeed."

Ryan's move alarmed Marcia Robinson Lowry, Children's Rights executive director.

"Two years is too short of a time to expect significant reform," she said. "We do think he's made a lot of progress, but they're far from over the hump. We are very concerned."

Ryan, a 41-year-old lawyer and formerly the state's first Child Advocate, said he will depart in about five weeks to oversee philanthropic work in Newark and Africa by the foundation created by multimillionaire and Newark booster Raymond Chambers.

"It's a wonderful opportunity," Ryan said of his new position with the MCJ Amelior Foundation. His title and duties are still under discussion, he said.

"Kevin's commitment to the work we are doing at the Foundation, both locally and internationally, will help strengthen our existing efforts," said Christine Chambers Gilfillan, president of The MCJ Amelior Foundation.

Economic concerns drove Ryan's decision to leave, according to two officials close to the commissioner who asked to remain anonymous because they were not authorized to discuss the matter. Ryan and his wife, Clare, of Fair Haven, have six children ranging in ages from 2-1/2 to 16, and they are worried about college expenses. Cabinet-level positions pay \$141,000 a year.

Ryan declined to comment on his personal situation.

Ryan is not the only top child welfare official leaving the department. Ryan's chief of staff, Lisa Eisenbud, is moving to Toronto where her husband, David, has been offered a sales executive position. Her last day is Feb. 1.

"There are a number of people who are hugely pivotal to the reform now and are not going anywhere in the near future," Eisenbud said. "There is a foundation to continue the work. The main thing is there is this governor and his 'whatever it takes' attitude. I think as long as he is there, we are going to be okay."