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
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Lawmaker hosts town halls across the state to highlight CPS experiences

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Gabriel Roxas

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CITRUS HEIGHTS, CA - Almost six months since the taking of Baby Sammy Nikolayev shined a spotlight on Child Protective Services, the push to change how children in California are protected is gaining momentum.

Assem. Tim Donnelly was the first to call for that audit of CPS. Back in June, lawmakers approved it, and a report is expected to be ready in January. In the meantime, Donnelly has been holding town halls across the state, and Thursday he got an earful in Citrus Heights.

One by one, they came to the microphone to tell stories of children taken from them by social workers.

"Open up the juvenile courts and then get rid of the immunity that all the social workers get," said Archie Overton, who supports reforms.

"I'd like to see accountability. I would like to see the judges that are sending these children with abusers, I'd like to see them off the bench. They're the criminals," said Connie Bedwell, who described her own battle to keep her daughter.



That kind of anger is something Donnelly said he's heard across California at town halls like this one.

"I got to say, listening to each and every story here today is truly heart-breaking," Donnelly told the crowd.

When police and social workers took Baby Sammy Nikolayev from his parents after a dispute over the boy's medical care, CPS came under fire by critics for being overly aggressive. Still other cases across the state blamed social workers for inaction.

Donnelly plans to propose a package of specific reforms once the state auditor releases a report early next year.

"Most of them revolve around requiring some level of criminality to be proved before children are removed from the home," Donnelly explained.

The lawmaker insisted he does believe in the value of the state audit, but he said he hopes to supplement the findings with his own investigation.

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