# Former Iowa pastor, foster parent charged with child molestation

**Lee Rood**, **lrood@dmreg.com** Published 6:53 p.m. CT Jan. 26, 2017 | **Updated 10:02 a.m. CT Jan. 27, 2017**

*(Photo: Special to the Register)*

The Dallas Center pastor charged this week with 13 criminal counts for allegedly sexually abusing a teenage girl was a licensed foster parent.

But Iowa's Department of Human Services wouldn't say Thursday whether the child he allegedly abused was under state supervision.

Randy August Johnson, 52, is accused of repeatedly sexually abusing a girl (/story/news/crime-and-courts/2017/01/25/iowa-dallas-center-faces-13-charges-including-sex-crimes-against-child/97066384/) from 2013 to 2014 while she was 12 and 13 years old, according to court records.

Most of the abuse reportedly occurred at his Dallas Center home, next door to Dallas Center Church of the Brethren, where Johnson formerly was the pastor. His next court date is Feb. 6.

Tim Button-Harrison, district executive for the Northern Plains District Church of the Brethren, which oversees the Dallas Center church, declined to say when or how Johnson's employment at the church ceased.

On Thursday morning, Johnson was still listed as the church's pastor on a Church of the Brethren website. The Dallas Center congregation has about 30 to 50 members, Button-Harrison said. He declined to comment further.

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**Dallas Center Church of the Brethren.** *(Photo: Charly Haley / The Register)*

The charges against Johnson come as a state senator has called for government oversight hearings (/story/news/investigations/readers-watchdog/2017/01/25/lawmaker-natalie-finn-case-iowa-workers-didnt-take-abuse-reports-seriously-before-teen-starved/97051964/) of two severe abuse cases involving home-schooled children (/story/news/investigations/readers-watchdog/2017/01/21/weak-home-school-laws-can-make-children-targets-abuse-experts-say/96551352/) who were adopted out of state foster care.

State Sen. Matt McCoy, D-West Des Moines, has said he wants to examine how Iowa's Department of Human Services screens parents for fostering and adoption, as well as how it treats mandatory reports of child abuse.

Amy Lorentzen McCoy, a spokeswoman for Human Services, confirmed that Johnson was a licensed foster parent from October 2004 to July 2007. McCoy said she couldn't comment on whether Johnson had adopted any children out of foster care, noting adoption records are confidential under state law.

"Despite background checks, home studies and ongoing services, there are times that foster and adoptive parents also abuse children," Lorentzen McCoy said in a statement. "We work hard to vet families to provide the safest home possible for all children. Like biological families, foster and adoptive families can have changes over time in family dynamics or behaviors — such as a parent developing mental illness or other life stressors — that put children at risk or lead to abuse."

Natalie Finn, 16, died Oct. 24 (/story/news/crime-and-courts/2016/12/28/numerous-abuse-reports-made-starved-child-case-lawmaker-says/95935520/) from cardiac arrest caused by emaciation after numerous child abuse reports were made to Iowa's Department of Human Services.

The West Des Moines teen was one of four children adopted out of foster care by Nicole and Joseph Finn, a divorced couple who has pleaded not guilty to multiple felony charges related to her death and the abuse of other children in the home. Three of the children were allegedly tortured in the Finns' home after she pulled them from public school last spring and said she was home-schooling.

Malayia Knapp, 18, says (/story/news/investigations/readers-watchdog/2017/01/21/iowa-beaten-locked-up-another-abuse-case-raises-questions-natalie-finn/96413476/) four of her half-siblings remain in an Urbandale home where she was severely abused and locked behind a steel door for a week with no food. Children in that home were also being home-schooled.

Knapp ran away in December 2015 and is now living with her pastor in Des Moines. A child-welfare case involving the remaining siblings is ongoing.



Sen. McCoy said he learned in a confidential briefing that two Department of Human Services employees, a child abuse investigator and a supervisor, were fired in the Finn case.

Sen. McCoy said Human Services Director Charles Palmer acknowledged in that briefing that the Finn abuse investigation was mishandled (/story/news/investigations/readers-watchdog/2017/01/25/lawmaker-natalie-finn-case-iowa-workers-didnt-take-abuse-reports-seriously-before-teen-starved/97051964/). Lorentzen McCoy, when asked Thursday if any changes at the agency had been made, said some training has been provided to staff.

She said the training has further clarified policies and practices on abuse intake criteria and emphasized the need to examine all of a case's history when making decisions. Guidance also has been given on examining new referrals when there is an open abuse case and when "activity" needs to be raised to the attention of an administrator.

She also said information technology enhancements are being made to help workers access key information.

"We are always reviewing our policies, practices and procedures to see how we can improve the system in keeping children and families safe," she said in a statement. "When we see that our policies were not followed, personnel action is taken."

Also on Thursday, Sen. Michael Breitbach, the Republican chairman of the Senate Oversight Committee, told Sen. McCoy he was not inclined to begin hearings while the felony cases against Nicole and Joseph Finn are pending.

"I believe based on the charges that it will be difficult to hear testimony from the Department of Human Services until the case has been decided," he said in a letter to McCoy.

Breitbach said he believes Human Services needs to "present changes" in policies and procedures to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

McCoy, a ranking Democrat on the oversight committee, said he agrees Human Services needs to review its policies and procedures, but he didn't think the agency should police itself. The state ombudsman's office has subpoenaed records in Natalie Finn's case, but has not said whether it is going to conduct an investigation.

If Breitbach does not agree to holding hearings, McCoy said, he would hold "transparent" hearings of his own focusing on the import of mandatory reporters in abuse cases and foster-adoption screening: "As legislators, as members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, and as parents, we need to do our jobs and investigate, legislate and provide oversight."

Iowa KidsNet conducts home studies of families on behalf of Human Services, and state workers approve or deny foster and adoption licenses, Lorentzen McCoy said.

"While high-profile cases bring additional scrutiny to our agency, we must always be taking a thoughtful, careful approach to how child welfare functions are performed and overseen," she said. "Legislators make the final determinations on the Department's authority to go into a family's home and investigate child abuse, and along with information from DHS, the courts make the determination regarding removals and placements."

The Register's Charly Haley contributed to this report.

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