D.C.'s child welfare agency has had to scrap an emergency-preparedness manual because it left thousands of needy kids to their own devices, the agency confirmed Wednesday.

Like most city agencies, the Child and Family Services Agency was required to come up with a disaster plan, which it submitted in September 2007. But the plan was so inadequate that the agency had to redo it, spokeswoman Mindy Goode told The Examiner.

“We were not thrilled with the way it came out,” Goode said.

The plan, required in order to obtain federal funding for the $281 million agency, was supposed to address ways of reaching and helping thousands of children who are CFSA wards in the event of a catastrophe, such as a flood or terrorist attack. But CFSA conceded in drafts of the plan it had “not finalized its disaster plan” and instead relied on promises that it “will develop contact lists and emergency information to foster families and other CFSA wards.”

The agency has been shaken by revelations that bureaucrats ignored desperate calls for help on behalf of Bunite Jacobs, a homeless woman, and her family. Jacobs has since been charged with murdering her four daughters in a ramshackle squatter’s home in Southeast.

For some observers of the child welfare agency, the botched emergency plan is further evidence of a bureaucracy that’s failing the city’s children.

“Federal law requires them to have emergency plans. They don’t have one,” said Matt Fraidin, a University of the District of Columbia law professor. “And that’s a crisis. These kids are in danger.”

Since Jacks’ arrest in January, the agency — already under federal court supervision because it failed to investigate abuse and neglect allegations — has been flooded with new cases. There are now at least 1,700 open cases at the agency and Fraidin and others fear that CFSA has reached a tipping point.

“There are concerns CFSA’s social workers do not have the support to accomplish their basic functions even under normal circumstances,” Fraidin added. “The recent spike in cases could push them even closer to a breaking point.”

While Child welfare officials are due in federal court next week as part of ongoing class-action litigation over the failure to protect the city’s wards.

The new disaster management plan is due in June, Goode said.

Got a tip on CFSA? Call Bill Myers at 202-459-4956 or send him an e-mail, bmyers@dcexaminer.com.

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EXAMINER EXCLUSIVE

Child-welfare agency scraps emergency plan

By Bill Myers
Examiner Staff Writer

An administrator in Prince George's County was released on $50,000 bail Wednesday afternoon after being indicted on four separate sex charges for allegedly molesting a 6-year-old male student while at school, according to a spokesman for the Prince George's County state's attorney.

Shadrick Munro Woods, 40, vice principal at Gaywood Elementary School since September 2006, allegedly watched security cameras in his office to track when students entered bathrooms, according to sources close to the investigation.

Woods allegedly followed boys into the bathroom and molested them, under the guise of helping them tuck in their shirts, sources said.

Suspicion fell upon Woods when a 6-year-old involved in the case started acting strangely and then came home with a new Game Boy, according to schools spokesman Dave Frazier.

Police are awaiting similar reports from other students.

The abuse was said to have occurred between Dec. 15, 2007, and March 10, 2008, when Woods, a Lanham resident, was reassigned to administrative duty outside of the school and away from children, according to schools spokesman John White.

A full background check prior to his hiring revealed no criminal history, White said, and the State's Attorney's Office backed up the finding.

Before his position at Gaywood, Woods worked in the Tampa, Fla.-based Hillsborough County Public Schools as a sixth-grade teacher and vice principal, according to Linda Cobb, an official with the Hillsborough school system.

In 1998, Cobb said, he was accused of pushing a student against a locker and grabbing his neck, a charge Woods denied.

He was served a letter of reprimand by the district, Cobb said, adding it was the one stain on his 11-year personnel record with the district.

Woods took a leave from his Hillsborough position at the same time he started at Gaywood.

He officially resigned from Hillsborough in June of 2007, nine months after taking the new job.

“He wasn’t supposed to do that,” Cobb said.

Pamela Pine, founder and CEO of Glenn Dale-based Stop the Silence, called childhood sexual abuse “a silent issue of epidemic proportions.”

More than one in four girls, and nearly one in six boys will be sexually abused by the time they’re 18 years old, Pine said, and more than 90 percent of the cases will be perpetrated by an adult well-known to the child.

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IT tax repeal has strong backing, but lawmakers look for possible sources of replacement funds

By Ray Lazarick
Examiner Staff Writer

Lawmakers really want to repeal the computer services sales tax they passed in the wee hours of November’s special session. But they haven’t quite figured out how to replace the money they hoped to rake in.

“The vast majority of members” support repeal, said House Speaker Michael Busch. Even Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, once a strong defender of the tech tax a Senate committee approved, now concedes there is “consensus that it should be repealed.”

Gov. Martin O’Malley, who hadn’t proposed the tax but signed it, still has concerns it would lead to “less government spending” and he had hoped it would “lead to more than 90 percent of the cases will be

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Md. official charged with molestation

By Leah Fabel
Examiner Staff Writer

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