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The Department of Children & Families, already engulfed in a nationwide scandal over the disappearance of a 5-year-old from foster care, has agreed to pay \$5 million to six Broward County siblings who were starved, abused and molested in foster care.

The settlement with the six children, identified in court documents as "the Roes," is the largest in the department's history.

Described by a federal judge as "a harrowing tale of abuse and neglect," the Roe children's five-year nightmare has much in common with the tragic story of Rilya Wilson, who disappeared from foster care in Miami-Dade County perhaps as early as January 2001.

Like Rilya, the Roe children were not visited by caseworkers for many months — 20 months according to court pleadings. Rilya may have been ignored by workers for 16 months.

And, like Rilya, the children were left with caregivers who had a disturbing past.

The Roe children were placed in the licensed foster home of Frank and Jacqui Lynch after state child welfare investigators had removed Jacqui Lynch's own daughter in 1987. Federal court records show that Jacqui Lynch's daughter was molested by her former husband, with her knowledge.

Department officials said at the time they also believed Jacqui Lynch had abused her daughter. Frank Lynch had "abandoned" his own children, the ruling states.

According to the 2000 lawsuit against four former DCF employees, the Roe children's foster mother gambled away their federal subsidies while the children were forced to sleep on the floor of the room they shared. The

DCF to pay \$5 million to six kids in Broward

Siblings abused while in state care

room doubled as their bathroom, and the children had to bathe in a pool.

Jack Moss, the DCF district administrator in Fort Lauderdale, declined to discuss the settlement Thursday, saying the incidents occurred before he took over the agency in Broward. "I don't have the details; it was before my watch," said Moss, who became the district head in July 2001.

An agency spokeswoman in Broward could not be reached for comment.

STARVING, ABUSED

"They were found starving. They were locked in a room. They had been physically and sexually abused," said Howard Talenfeld, a Fort Lauderdale attorney who sued on the children's behalf and has been a persistent critic of the agency.

"This was horrible abuse... They were treated worse than dogs."

Four of the Roe children were placed in the Lynch home in December 1991. Within a month, the abuse began, according to a Sept. 24, 2001, ruling by U.S. District Judge Federico Moreno that allowed the Roes' lawyer to sue.

As early as February 1992, a lay guardian for the children told caseworkers that Roes 1 through 4 had "exhibited drastic behavior changes," and "appeared intimidated," Moreno wrote.

John Roe 1 was described by the guardian ad litem as a "whipped dog."

John Roe 5, and Jane Roe, the only daughter, were placed in the Lynch home on Jan. 2, 1994.

In 1993, the Lynch's then-15-year-old son was arrested for

sexual misconduct on a minor. The boy allegedly videotaped himself having sex with a 14-year-old girl.

"Copies of the videotape were then distributed in the neighborhood," Moreno wrote.

STAYED IN HOME

When department officials became aware of the arrest, they called a meeting with supervisors and caseworkers to decide what to do, Moreno

wrote.

"Despite this event, and discussions where it was revealed that there had been sexual abuse of Mrs. Lynch's natural daughter," the ruling stated, DCF officials "unanimously decided that the children remain with the Lynches, and [their son], in violation of policy."

Talenfeld says at least four of the Roe children were molested in the home.