

Commissioner Statement for *Juan F v Lamont* Exit Plan Status Report
April 1, 2019- September 30,2019

This is such an exciting and promising time to work in child welfare in Connecticut! A number of critical developments are underway with the potential to significantly improve how we partner with providers to serve children and families in our state.

First, in the context of the *Juan F.* Exit Plan, I am pleased that the Court Monitor can "pre-certify" that the Department has achieved maintaining caseload standards. This measure is truly fundamental to **all** our work. Appropriate staffing equates to better safety decisions, risk assessments and timely intervention for children and families. As we ask our social workers to involve children, families and communities more fully as partners in our work, we must ensure that staff have the necessary time and support to do so. Thus, reasonable caseloads are critically important. Tremendous appreciation and thanks to Governor Lamont, the Office of Policy and Management, and the Connecticut Legislature for their steady and substantial support this past year.

This support and capacity comes at an important juncture as we work hard to fulfill the vision of this new Administration. Our values are clear and simple:

- Keep children safely at home whenever possible;
- place children with relatives (*including maternal and paternal family*) to maintain kinship bonds, if they must enter state care and
- if they cannot be safely placed with someone they know, children will be in a family through our strong networks of foster family homes.

We have also steadily reduced the use of institutional care for those children who require out of home clinical treatment. Only 7.2 percent of children in care on January 1, 2020 were in congregate or group care.

These were the goals I set out immediately upon assuming the role of Commissioner one year ago. In less than one year, we have reduced the number of children in state care by almost 6 percent while at the same time increasing the share of children living with relatives and kin. I am very proud of the work of our staff in making significant progress in each of these areas.

Multidisciplinary assessments and Enhanced Service Coordination will serve to more accurately identify root causes of familial strife and match to the appropriate services to address those needs. The deployment of tablets and continued development of CT-KIND will enable improved documentation and data collection efforts through technology. Supervision of all staff regardless of position or function is also a priority focus with an emphasis on the more consistent utilization of Structured Decision Making tools related to safety and risk factors.

During this period under review, the department participated in the Statewide Advisory Council's (SAC) annual retreat. Throughout this forum our aspirational targets were solidified through feedback heard from partners including youth, family advocates, providers, sister state agencies, and legislative

representatives. This forum served to emphasize our desire to be inclusive of all voices as we continue to collaborate in improving outcomes for children.

The Department has also begun, in earnest, the planning stages of developing our CT state plan in response to the federal *Family First Prevention Services Act*. DCF hosted a standing-room-only kickoff in November 2019 which was attended by our child welfare system partners. Since that event, over 200 stakeholders have been participating on five distinct *Family First* workgroups. The provisions of *Family First* are a part of the framework in an overall prevention strategy. For CT's children and families to benefit from *Family First*, stakeholder involvement is absolutely vital in the state plan development. We are excited to be a galvanizing element on this team approach to fully engaged communities in empowering families to raise resilient children who thrive!

We, at DCF, are committed to continuing progress. To that end, in early January the DCF Executive team held a statewide summit for our leadership teams from all 14 area offices, facilities and central office divisions to clearly focus the department's vision for 2020. We were fortunate to have Dr. Jerry Milner, Acting Commissioner of the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, offer an inspiring and energizing keynote about the necessity to expand prevention efforts in child welfare, including opportunities within *Family First*. Dr. Milner's invigorating presentation is in concert with this Administration's vision for the child welfare system in Connecticut. The summit was a wonderful opportunity to reinforce our common values of keeping children safely at home, and re-aligning our services to ensure the highest risk populations have their needs met.

We greatly appreciate the work of the Office of the Court Monitor and the Federal Court in supporting our steadfast efforts towards approaching an exit from Juan F. I again thank the Connecticut General Assembly and the Lamont Administration, including the Governor's Office, the Office of Policy and Management and our sister state agencies. The department's executive team is continually grateful to the DCF staff, who do great and difficult work each day. We thank the thousands of partners in communities across Connecticut standing with us. Service providers, educators, law enforcement officials, court personnel, medical providers and others are all making fantastic contributions to our efforts to support children and families through difficult times.

Most of all, we thank the children and families themselves for their active engagement in all our efforts. They hold the answers, and we need to listen to continue to make our state a great place for all of us to live.