



Court Monitor Report Finds DCF Investigations Meet Goals For Quality and Timeliness Another Outcome Measure Is "Pre-certified" Leaving Only Three Measures Remaining September 10, 2020

HARTFORD - The federal court monitor for the *Juan F.* Exit Plan found that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has met another outcome measure required to end federal court oversight. A report issued today by the court monitor "pre-certified" that the measurement of the quality of child abuse and neglect investigations has met its goal.

Governor Ned Lamont stated, "This milestone is yet another example of the progress being made at the Department of Children and Families under Commissioner Dorantes. Under her leadership, she has charted a clear and positive direction for this agency which will benefit all residents. I am proud of the entire team at DCF for this forward momentum."

DCF Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes said that Intake staff, who conduct their work as part of CT's Differential Response System, have made important strides in protecting children and working effectively with families.

"Investigations can become extremely complicated; they take a great deal of skill, patience and empathy. Social Workers in Intake engage with parents and their children on assessing the validity of facts reported but also start the process of matching identified needs to services to help families," Commissioner Dorantes said. "Refining the *front door* of our operations is a slightly different approach for the agency. Investigators have longstanding relationships with community stakeholders which is foundational to this adjustment. I am extremely proud of our hard-working Intake staff as well as our dedicated partners in improving outcomes."

Commissioner Dorantes, who began her social work career with the Department in 1992, said it is particularly gratifying that the investigations exit outcome measure was attained because most of her front-line experience was in Intake operations.

"I know this work very well," she said. "I understand how complex it is, and it makes me especially proud of our workforce."

The Court Monitor's report says: "The review demonstrated that the Department makes strong efforts to interview children and families in a timely manner, conduct appropriate formal and informal assessments, offer services as needed, and document the resulting findings in the case record."

The finding means that the Department now has only three remaining outcome measures to meet before seeking termination of the federal court oversight. The measures are (1) case planning, (2) meeting children's needs, and (3) visitation for families whose children are in the home. Today's report says "significant progress has been made" with those measures as well.

"It appears that the enhancement of services with documented waitlists that was part of the current budget, along with continued improvements with assessment and care coordination are having a positive impact," the report states. "The number of incidents of unmet needs identified within sampled cases was again reduced from previous quarters."

Furthermore, the report states, "It must be noted that for the first time ever, that the findings for the First Quarter of 2020 indicates the department achieved all the domains. ...we will follow up to see if these gains have been sustained."

This report measured the quality of work during the last quarter of calendar year 2019 and the first quarter of 2020. Due to the extraordinary challenges presented by the COVID pandemic, the Court Monitor's report took the opportunity to examine Department operations since the crisis fully hit the state and the nation in mid-March.

"Extraordinary efforts have been made by the agency and their partners during this time of crisis," the report states. "Commissioner Dorantes and her team maintained ongoing operations throughout this period as the agency continues to respond to the everchanging circumstances and emerging challenges with additional instructions, precautions and actions. Communication by the DCF Administration has been frequent, honest, and effective with both her staff and outside stakeholders. Front-line Social Worker responders, Solnit North and South facility staff, and Careline staff continued their 24/7 work despite the many challenges. Foster parents (both Department core families and Therapeutic Foster families) continued to meet the needs of the children in their homes despite the threat and hardships that COVID-19 presents for them. Their dedication is remarkable."

Commissioner Dorantes said the recognition from the court monitor reinforces her appreciation of Department staff and their work during the crisis. "Despite many obstacles in balancing DCF's mission critical work with the health and safety of our workforce, ~~our~~ staff have been extremely effective in working together with families to both empower and support them while implementing an array of services. This has required tremendous creativity in the use of technology, but also in engaging with families and communities to find solutions for their challenges."

The following statement was issued by Ira Lustbader, Litigation Director at Children's Rights, and Steven Frederick, Partner at Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin & Kuriansky, who are co-counsel for the plaintiff children in the [Juan F.](#) case.

"We are encouraged by the Administration's continued progress toward full compliance and exit with court-ordered improvements at DCF because it means more children and families are receiving better care and support. DCF Commissioner Dorantes has also made racial equity a top priority for DCF, which we fully support. As the state navigates through the COVID-19 pandemic and its many challenging impacts in the coming months, we look forward to working with agency leadership so that these hard-earned improvements for kids and families at DCF are both maintained and accelerated where needed."

The complete text of a statement from Commissioner Dorantes is as follows: [Commissioner's Statement for Juan F. v Lamont Exit Plan Status Report](#)

Here is the Court Monitor's cover letter and the [Court Monitor's Cover Letter](#) and 4th quarter status report [Juan F. v Lamont Exit Plan Status Report-4th Quarter 2019 & 1st Quarter 2020](#)