

STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

9/14/20

Attendees:

Sarah Lockery*, Suprena Shuler*, Chris Scott, Dr. Regina Moeller*, Myke Halpin*, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata, Marie Mormile-Mehler*, Samaris Rose, Dr. Irv Jennings*, Dr. Damion Grasso*, Ken Mysogland, Deb Kelleher, Stephanie Cotton, Amani (fka Mariyem) Sehloui, Rachel Spells, Judy Eisenberg*

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests:

Elizabeth Duryea, Susan Cunningham, Jonathan Jacaruso, Sergio Alvarez, Sarah Gibson, Stanley Kasanowski, Johanna Schmidt, Malcolm Blue

Minutes:

- Approval of meeting minutes from June, July, and August was tabled until the next meeting as the SAC members did not have time to review the minutes prior to the meeting
- August meeting minutes were very detailed - as a SAC, members should review the minutes and determine whether this is an appropriate level of detail.

Memberships:

Introduction of any new people in the room:

- This meeting included Judy E, who is replacing Sarah L as the Reg 2 RAC representative. and Johanna S., who will be attending SAC meetings and taking notes.

Progress of membership outreach assignments:

- Sarah L. updated members on whether they had any requirements yet to meet in order to participate. Chris, Rosie, Sammy, and Deb were all set. Amani needed to send a few additional materials (narrative and mailing address). Sam needed to send their narrative. Elisabeth Cannatta, Stephanie, and a few others still needed to submit their application.
 - o Note - Amani was previously known as Mariyem but has changed her name to Amani.
- Sarah explained that once the applications are all submitted and complete, the applications will be forwarded to the Governor's office for consideration for appointment. The next step will be to complete a background questionnaire.
- There is still one vacancy on the SAC, that of a child psychiatrist. The group reiterated that they would like a person of color to fill this vacancy.

SAC Member Advisement

Follow-Up on Assignments:

- No discussion

RAC Reports:

- Region 1
 - Region 1 had their last meeting on August 21st. At that meeting, Bev Green gave updates on trainings for foster parents that will take place starting 9/7.
 - There were no updates on when visitors will be allowed in the offices again, or when staff will be required to report to the office.
 - Right now, about 10% of staff are reporting in. OTCs are still happening, but the courts are not open yet.
 - A subcommittee has been doing planning related to timely permanency and the age-out population; they have incorporated a racial justice component in this work.
 - They also examined the disproportionality data and requested to see past disproportionality data to see the fluctuation over time. They hope to continue to integrate racial justice work and other social justice work into their work.
- Region 2
 - At the last meeting, Sarah stepped down as chair. Judy stepped in and reflected on Sarah's leadership. They had no request for advisement and discussed the new system for communication between the SAC and RAC.
 - They also discussed learning about and incorporating anti-racism, where they are with the RAC/CRP (since their body functions as both), and wanting to do more outreach in New Haven and in the regions.
 - Sarah mentioned that the RAC learned DCF already has 2 documents to learn about family voice and it was not clear if the documents were being used. ("In Your Words" and the Family Feedback narrative) The RAC recommends that the Department assess the usefulness of these forms and if needed, revise them to help advance racial justice efforts, rather than re-inventing the wheel and creating more paperwork for staff .
- Region 3
 - Region 3 will be meeting soon to discuss DCF, Safe & Sound, and the racial justice initiatives being put forth.
 - The Willimantic racial justice team will present at that meeting.
- Region 4
 - Jen was not at the meeting to present, but Sarah G. was.
 - On August 18th, the RAC met and delivered the Department's anti-racist framework.

- They will meet again tomorrow to discuss what they've learned and provide feedback on the framework and partnership. They were not able to discuss this at the last meeting as they ran out of time.
- The CRP is heavily engaged in their data and needs assessment. They have come up with seven recommendations for the RAC, and they are partnering on how to address this.
- Region 5
 - Deb said that Region 5 does not have many updates since they have not met since the last SAC meeting.
 - They have been working on youth recruitment - going through youth networks and youth service bureaus and discussing. There is one youth that may spearhead this effort.
 - The group has a Voluntary Services presentation scheduled for October 5th.
 - Sergio added that they have had RED discussions with their partners and will continue to discuss with a racial justice lens.
 - The anti-racist framework was discussed with the ODs so they could determine the best way to present this to the RAC. They considered incorporating this information into a normal meeting but decided it would be better to have a special meeting dedicated to this so that they will not feel rushed.
 - Their last meeting was in July and their next meeting is October 5th; they will have more updates in October after that meeting.
- Region 6
 - Region 6 and systems managers held a discussion of DCF's anti-racism work. They discussed the history and set the bar high. This took up most of the meeting, so at the next meeting, they will discuss specific anti-racism initiatives.
 - One of their subcommittees wanted to do something concrete, so they distributed "RAC Packs" using the 400 backpacks that were donated to them by several agencies. These backpacks will be given to DCF youth in Region 6.
 - Families submitted art designs for the backpacks, postcards, and packs. The packs were stuffed with books, coloring books, colored pencils, and other supplies, as well as FASU donations. They will distribute the packs this week through the DCF offices.
 - Region 6 also noted that Manny Sandoval, a former RAC member, wrote a children's book intended to inform children about the pandemic, called What is a Pie-medic? Manny donated 125 copies to the RAC to include in their RAC Packs.

SAC Member Reports:

- Damion was present and mentioned the survey that was brought up at the previous SAC meeting.
- There were no other updates

SAC Budget Reports

- The SAC spent \$250 since the last meeting on gift cards for members' participation.
- There is \$13,150 left in the budget.
- Sarah thanked Regina and let the group know that their stipends will be going out soon.

DCF Report

Discussion of any items as required by statute and ask of SAC:

- Cindy Butterfield and Vinny Russo were on the call to provide updates regarding DCF's budget submission and legislative proposals the Department may raise.
- Ken shared that DCF has achieved precertification on its Investigations Outcome Measure. The Court Monitor reported 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." This is a very solid accomplishment. The Department now has three outcome measures left to meet: 1) case planning, 2) meeting children's needs, and 3) visitation for families whose children are in the homes. The SAC was also reminded that the Department achieved precertification on its caseload outcome measure earlier this year.
- More Department staff members have been coming into the office, but DCF reiterates that the Department never closed. All children in DCF care are now subject to the triage process for in-person visitation. This is an internal meeting that determines any barriers to an in-person visitation. These meetings are being held inside DCF offices as well as outside (in parks, for example). For in-home cases, the Department will try to make contact remotely, but they will go in person if the circumstances require.
- The courts are beginning to reopen; they have started hearing adoptions and have slowly begun hearing uncontested cases. Although the Judicial Department is opening, local courts still decide the cadence of hearings, so there is some variation by court. Neglect and TPR hearings are being phased in, but that is decided on the local level.
- JoShonda Guerrier and Ken Mysogland will be resuming the Family First planning efforts, starting on 9/29 with a Family First Re-Launch meeting to re-orient Department members and workgroup members to the process. Family First efforts

were paused during COVID, but the Department is resuming them in order to craft a prevention plan that can be submitted by April. Although this is later than the original submission goal, this still well within the timeframe of the federal legislation and should not pose any problems. Ken said that the collaboration with the community regarding Family First has been tremendous - the pandemic made planning rough, but we are resuming from a solid foundation. Sarah Lockery encouraged the SAC members to see what subcommittees their RAC members are on and ask them to update the RAC on the workgroup progress. The RAC can then provide feedback, which will allow greater community voice in the committees.

Budget Report with Cindy Butterfield:

- Cindy shared that one aspect of the budget was submitted on 9/1; this is the bookkeeping part that provides a historical report of the previous budget. The budget cycle runs on a 2-year time period, and the 2022-23 budget is meant to use the 2020 budget as a baseline. Of course, 2020 has been a weird year, so we are also using past data to show what the budget was and what it would have been without COVID. Large adjustments due to patterns (e.g. rising adoption) can shift the money flow, so trend data is also incorporated. They show a "normal" version of 2020 since 2022-23 will (hopefully) be normal years, so the Department wanted to balance the reality of the year with what it would have otherwise looked like.
- On 10/1, the Department will submit its budget option. All state agencies have been asked for a 10% reduction. The Department is still working to meet this. After submission, OPM will work with the Department to revise it, and it then goes into the Governor's budget. The legislature will have a look and negotiate from there.
- Sarah explained that the SAC wanted to advise the Department and asked whether there would be any chance for input on the budget. Cindy explained that at this stage, the budget is very confidential and FOIA is not applicable here. Information sharing will be limited, but if the SAC can let them know what they want information about, and she would do her best to accommodate; however, she would need this about two weeks before 10/1 since that budget must be submitted then, and they need about two weeks to create a final proposal.
- The Governor does not communicate with the Department about the budget until around February. The Department sees his final budget a few hours before it is publicly available. The Department then analyzes his budget, then the legislature will discuss it. The Department will answer questions about it at that time.
- Vinny explained that our portion of the budget will be discussed by the Appropriations Committee, specifically the Health and Human Services subcommittee. They will discuss and support the Department. Vinny recommended having the SAC also discuss the budget and submit testimony at that time. That

would begin in February and last until June, which would give the SAC and the Department more preparation.

- Cindy agreed that this would be a good opportunity for the SAC to get involved. She also reiterated that OPM has been pushing no new spending. They are looking for savings and federal funding whenever possible.
- Because the SAC will be involved in February, the group agreed that in January or February, they would have a preparatory discussion to learn what is in the Governor's budget.
- Ken agreed that the SAC can play a big role in advocacy as well as input on the Department's submission.
- Any ideas about the budget should be sent to Cindy, Ken, or Vinny - they should be sent as soon as possible due to the time crunch!

Legislative Report with Vinny Russo:

- Vinny explained that the first submission date is 10/1, where he will give OPM a basic idea of what will be formally submitted.
- The first item for submission be a resubmission of last year's bill, which did a couple of important things:
 1. Technical changes - for example, removes language regarding juvenile justice (since that is no longer under the Department).
 2. Revising legislative report requirements - right now, the Department submits about 30 reports every year; however, many of the issues addressed in these reports are also addressed by our federal reports (annual report, performance enhancement, etc.). Given that the information is similar, this proposal would replace some of those legislative reports with the federal reports. It would still follow the same submission process but would reduce administrative redundancy.
 3. QRTP requirements - the Family First legislation states that residential treatment facilities will only be reimbursed if they are QRTPs (Qualified Residential Treatment Programs). There are certain guidelines that need to be added in order for facilities to be considered QRTPs (such as a judicial review, etc.) that should be outlined in the statute.

The final bill that includes the above changes is around 15 or 16 pages long, and Vinny agreed to send it to Ken in case anything needs to be tweaked. The SAC did not raise any issues with the above changes.

- The second submission will address the SAC's request to amend their structure to include an APRN. Vinny spoke with the Commissioner about the request, and she wondered if it made sense to specify an APRN, or if the SAC's intentions could be met by something broader, like "healthcare professional with a specialization in

- children." This would open it up to pediatricians or other professions, so the SAC may have an easier time finding someone to fulfill that role. The group was reminded that the original request came because the legislation currently specifies a psychiatrist, which has been difficult to fill, and that there were already a good amount of folks specializing in children's behavioral health who participate on the SAC; there is no one who specializes in primary care. The SAC agreed that even without the legislation specifying a psychiatrist, the group would be able to regulate itself and make sure there are behavioral health experts present. The SAC members were also all right with the flexibility provided by healthcare professional.
- The above two bills are being proposed by DCF, but DCF is also aware of other bills that are being proposed that would involve the Department and could lead to testimony submission. The first of these is a request from DOC to DCF to allow DOC to access DCF records on past treatment for the purpose of determining appropriate treatment for youth in Detention. DOC would still have to request the records from DCF, it would not be an automatic transfer. Many youth in DOC custody have mental health issues; this would allow them to share records to better determine their treatment needs. One person asked whether the guardian would be informed of the request - Ken was not sure of this as it has not been fully spelled out yet. Another member said that on the surface, this is good, but she wondered if the Department has spoken to advocates yet. Vinny elaborated that currently, 17-A says that several organizations have access to these records but they cannot be disclosed without consent. There is a concern that in a criminal trial, this could violate the law. He said that they can look at making the language more specific and creating some limits on who could access the information and what would be disclosed. Someone asked to clarify whether the treatment plan would be done with DCF or solely by DOC. Ken explained that there would be joint meetings if there is an open DCF case, but this legislation also applies to situations where there is prior DCF involvement (case has been closed), in which case, DCF would not be involved in the treatment.
 - Another technical change is to move the statutes regarding the Youth Services Bureaus from under the State Department of Education to under the Department of Children and Families (essentially move that language to 17-A).
 - Vinny prefers a "less is more" approach to legislation (i.e., if something can be accomplished without legislation, it should be). That being said, there is a push to help DCF youth get bank accounts. He would like to implement a policy shift that would allow DCF to be the co-signer. This could take the form of a partnership with local credit unions, in conjunction with a program to teach youth about financial literacy. There are some programs like this already in existence; Vinny explained that they are hoping to expand these.

- Vinny reiterated that due to Connecticut's budget deficit, a lot of time is going to be spent resolving budget disagreements. He is hoping to develop more proposals.
- Getting Family First off the ground will be a heavy lift.
- Vinny told the group he would update them if he hears of other bills that will involve the Department.

Anti-Racist Work in DCF

- This upcoming Wednesday (9/16), the Department will have a Fall Leadership Summit in which the divisions will discuss their change initiatives. Ken provided some information on the change initiatives within the Bureau of External Affairs.
- External Affairs will first ensure that their messaging, visuals, and stories accurately reflect the racial breakdown of our kids. We have the statistics on our makeup, but the stories the Department has been sharing has not lined up with those proportions. Moving forward, we want to have equity in messaging. For example, all of our stories about foster parents so far have featured white foster parents, despite the diversity of our foster parents.
- On the legislative side, the Department plans on discussing their anti-racist framework with the legislature.
- In the Office of Community Relations (formerly the Ombudsman), there is a lot of data. The OCR will start capturing the race of the family/case and compare the breakdown of calls with the makeup of that region. For example, more Black families calling the OCR for inquiries from a specific office may indicate that those families are not being treated equitably by that office. The Department has not previously captured this data, and it will provide clear and measurable insights.
- Ken asked for feedback. One person pointed out that as far as messaging goes, knowing that the Department disproportionately services POC, does it make sense to increase the number of POC in their messaging? Or will this reinforce the message that these children are being harmed? Ken felt this was a good point, but he also highlighted that we do not only want to focus on stories of children in care - the Department has many stories about families staying together.
- One member said they appreciated the transparency and framing. They felt that the Department's approach took on a transitional and restorative justice lens.
- Another person asked what the goal is when presenting the anti-racist framework to the legislature. Ken said that it is meant to get this in front of them and seeing where it leads. It is mainly to give them an awareness of where the Department is at. On that note, he asked what the SAC (and RACs) would like to see from legislation.
- A participant pointed out the importance of having equal access to telehealth and the documents to support that. Telephone-only options must remain on the table

- for families that do not have internet access - do not let those services be cut. Ken recommended that this recommendation be sent to Cindy, Vinny, and himself.
- A member asked whether the Department is considering doing presentations to or with the other state agencies? It may help them be more mindful of their impact. Ken agreed but explained that DCF must first get itself in order before trying to move to other agencies. He encouraged the RAC to continue having these discussions too.
 - The group was asked whether everyone had a good understanding of at least one question they could bring to the RAC.
 - Ken agreed to send out a condensed written summary of the proposals.
 - Elizabeth Duryea gave a summary of the change initiatives being taken on by the Systems division. They plan on focusing on both internal and external engagement.
 - Externally, Systems will be partnering with the RACs and provider meetings. In these meetings, they will lift up the topic of racial justice. They will also participate in the "Train the Trainer" initiative and brainstorm ways to include this into other trainings and existing partnerships.
 - Internally, there are over 80 contracts and service matches in the Department, which can get overwhelming. Systems will use the ESC model to streamline referrals. This model can guide decision-making, and they can also collect data on potential bias in referrals as well as service array data. There will be a 5-part learning series on service matching.

RAC Meeting Cadence

- Region 1: 2nd Friday of the month
- Region 2: 1st Friday morning of each month
- Region 3: meets quarterly on Wednesdays
- Region 4: meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at noon
- Region 5: meets on the last Monday of every other month, except this October (will meet on the 1st Monday of October)
- Region 6: meets on the first Thursday of every month from 3:00-4:30 pm

Closing Thoughts

- One person agreed that they will bring DCF updates and data back to the RAC but would like disparity data from the past 10 years.

SAC Assignments

- Review and gather feedback about the DCF Change Initiatives presented by Ken and Elizabeth
- Provide response to DCF budget and legislative reports, if any

The SAC's next meeting will be on **Monday, October 5 from 9:30 am-12:00 pm.**