

STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

01/04/21

Attendees:

Myke Halpin*, Sarah Lockery*, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata*, Christopher Scott, Deb Kelleher, Judy Eisenberg*, Jennifer Nadeau*, Lisa Girard, Marie Mormile-Mehler*, Ken Mysogland, Dr. Regina Moeller*, Samaris Rose, Amani Sehloui, Dr. Irv Jennings*, Suprena Shuler*, Stephanie Cotton

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests:

Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes, Sergio Alvarez, Susan Cunningham, Elizabeth Duryea, Sarah Gibson, Jeff Gold, Jon Jacaruso, Johanna Schmidt, Rachel C., Stephen Singley

Commissioner's Remarks

- Commissioner Dorantes joined the call to speak a bit about the Department. She became the Commissioner in 2019 and began her tenure with a health scare. Her team kept the boat moving, along with the support of the SAC. This body has grown and their voices are being heard. The SAC was highlighted this week. We are also at the halfway point in her time as Commissioner.
- Some key focuses the Commissioner wanted to highlight:
 - o Relative/kinship care is a major focus of this administration
 - o The Department has reaffirmed its commitment to racial justice
 - o DCF is partnering with other state agencies to better fill the gaps in our system
 - o Connecticut is a small but mighty state, and we have been recognized at the federal level
 - o Chris Scott and other youth voices have made a huge impact on our work
 - o The Department continues to work on its Family First Prevention Plan and creating a more prevention-focused system
- The Commissioner is happy to continue leading this work.
- Commissioner took some time to answer questions from the SAC:

Q: How do you feel regarding vaccine distribution?

A: The Commissioner does have some information from DPH's planning updates. The workgroup that is handling vaccine rollout is chaired by DPH Commissioner Gifford and Dr. Eadie, both of whom are very capable. Only DCF's Solnit Centers are considered to be healthcare, so that portion is being vaccinated along with other healthcare workers. The vaccine is not mandatory, and the Department is ensuring staff are knowledgeable about the vaccine. So far, it has been a successful rollout and she is very encouraged.

Q: This is a two-part question; 1) How is the Department ensuring protocol and language is consistent across the state, and 2) Without knowing when the pandemic will end, how is the Department ensuring kids are getting services and that new services are being offered?

A: For question #1, SDs and ODs are working together with local connections and a central contact. Initially, decisions around in-person visitation were made to make sure that staff were not transmitting the virus, and over time, a triage process has been

developed to determine what can be done remotely/in-person. Families appreciated virtual calls. Sarah Lockery added that consistency can also be more of a RAC/SAC priority as well, and the SAC agreed.

For question #2, engagement is more important than necessarily being in-person or virtual. Families need to feel heard. Triage can vary based on vulnerabilities and public health guidelines. The Commissioner also mentioned youth who are aging out, which is a vulnerable time; the Department is making sure their connection to future services is useful and positive, and they are looking at the efficiency of that program. Further, SDs are developing ways to ensure the service array is meeting needs, as we will need a strong service array. Many folks have telehealth connections, although some do not. We have also done surveys and town halls for feedback; if you have any suggestions on areas to strengthen, please let the SDs know.

The Commissioner also highlighted the changes to DCF's Voluntary Services program. Early in the administration, families explained that coming to the Department is an issue, so DCF has taken steps to move voluntary services to an outside agency, with some DCF oversight for efficiency.

Q: In order to access Voluntary Services, families still have to call the Careline. Will this change?

A: The Careline number is used to track data. In the process of shifting Voluntary Services, the idea of creating a new phone number was raised, but it was realized that it would cost more to create a standalone number. DCF does understand the barrier of keeping the Careline number, and the issue could be raised again, but it has been considered. Ken added that there has been a lot of discussion around this in the community, and he would like more messaging about the fact that the Department no longer manages it. Eligibility is still handled by DCF.

Q: In virtual visits, how are safety measures addressed?

A: DCF staff do consider the safety of having visits remote vs in person. When it is in person, there is PPE guidance and protocol for families to wear masks. When working remotely with families, it is difficult to assess the physical surroundings, but it is still possible to engage them and the connection is way more telling. Families need to feel comfortable sharing their needs. Lately, we have also been seeing more acute issues with people who were not initially involved with the Department.

- At this point the Commissioner had to leave.

Minutes:

- There was a correction to the December minutes, which has been resolved.
- Regina motioned to approve the December minutes, Marie seconded, and the SAC approved the motion.
- Johanna agreed to start posting the minutes on the DCF website.

Membership:

- Stephanie will be mailing her application.
- Stephen and Elisabeth's applications are still pending

- The child psychiatrist position is still open, as is the opening for an attorney. Martha Stone may be able to help with suggesting an attorney.
- Ideally, the SAC would like these positions filled by people of color, and they would also like more men involved, not just women.

RAC Reports

Region 1

- Suprena shared that the region has developed a PowerPoint, which they are now editing, that will clarify the RAC and CRP. They are also working on an orientation/elevator pitch that they will intro at their January 15 meeting. They hope this will improve the consistency of their messaging.

Region 2

- Judy explained that the Region 2 RAC has not met since the last SAC meeting, but they now have a fiduciary. Right now, they are orienting the fiduciary on the RAC's financial history.
- Judy loved Region 1's orientation idea and may adopt that for their RAC.
- The RAC is up to date with their stipends, and they will meet with the fiduciary regarding processes to steward these funds.
- In the RAC's 1/8 meeting, they will discuss housekeeping and possibly switching the time they meet.
- The RAC will also receive implicit bias training.

Region 3

- Lisa and Regina shared that the Region 3 RAC is meeting quarterly, and their next meeting will be in March.
- The RAC-FAB created a new flyer with Myke, and they also agree that orientation is a good idea.

Region 4

- Jennifer discussed Hartford's breakthrough collaboration regarding fatherhood engagement. They have considered how that could translate to other offices.
- Stipends are all up to date.
- The RAC did a survey of around 80 people as part of efforts to improve engagement.
- They also appreciate the Spotlight Newsletter; they have heard mainly positive feedback and folks enjoy the personal stories and photos. The only suggestion they had was to consider shortening the stories, as some are rather long.

Region 5

- There was no December meeting for the Region 5 RAC, so the updates were mainly a reiteration of the previous updates.
- The SHAPE meeting was well-attended.
- The region's anti-bias work has been front and center.
- They have discussed schools going remote and the spike in cases.
- Jennifer Avenia presented on immigrants in the region.

Region 6

- Marie said that there was a brief meeting in December to catch up and learn about recent Family First updates.
- The Programs and Service Array workgroup shared that there are many EBPs in Connecticut, and they have recently finished up their initial recommendations, so other workgroups will pick up their work and take it to the next phase.
- The Tri-Chair Youth position has been filled, and they will be voting them in that week. It has been filled by a UConn student who is very interested in participating.
- The group has been working on info-sharing, with a focus on the Citizen's Review Panel, and they will be hearing from CHR.
- The RAC has gotten survey information from Region 4, and they will be reviewing it.
- Thursday is the next meeting, and they will discuss whether they need a subcommittee.
- The RAC has continued to review the racial justice initiatives.

SAC Member Updates

- Chris shared some recent successes of Sun's Scholars, including that all students have maintained their funding/scholarships. Stipend checks for youth have often been late or missing across the state, and while Sun's has been able to help provide support a little, the Department should be aware of this issue and hopefully resolve it. Ken offered to call and discuss.
- Lisa let the group know that FAVOR is doing a parent/child advocacy training in January in both English and Spanish, and those who are interested should let her know. It will be a recurring program.
- The SAC report is about to be finalized.
- Racial justice is a standing item, and folks will be invited to these meetings to discuss change initiatives.

Budget Update

- Current balance: \$12,451.26
- Because there was no retreat in 2020, no money has been taken out for that
- December stipends will be around \$200 and will go out soon
- Some money will be coming in from FAVOR, but it is unclear whether it has gone through yet.

Jeff Gold and Racial Justice

- Jeff Gold is a PS in Manchester, and he joined the SAC meeting to share and get feedback for a change initiative he developed as part of the LAMM training for middle managers. LAMM is meant to enhance the ability for leadership with respect to child welfare. There is a focus on 1) people, 2) change, 3) results, and 4) context.
- Ken Mysogland serves as Jeff's "supercoach" for the program. As fatherhood is at the core of his work, it is the focus of his change initiative.

- DCF's already engages fathers through FELT and fatherhood events, and while the Department is proud of how it has enhanced that work, this initiative is meant to further engage fathers, particularly fathers of color.
- The initiative "Enhancing Fatherhood Engagement for men of color through the delivery of contracted IFP services" is meant to start small, and then build based on data/assessment.
- Jeff would like to see the needs of fathers of color assessed and met through an equity lens. Fatherhood engagement must be targeted and deliberate. The goal is equitable engagement and service delivery.
- Families are strengthened by engaged fathers, and there are racial and ethnic disparities, which can be seen through the pathways data for the Manchester office. Hispanic/Latinx and African American children enter care at disproportionately high rates, and the disparity index shows that things are getting even more disparate.
- The ACR process, part of DCF's QI systems, creates a report after each ACR that considers 40 domains. Jeff pulled four of these regarding DCF's work with fathers.
- Jeff looked at out of home case data, not in-home cases, which provides good context for the overall work. He looked at data related to the frequency of visits, quality of visits, collateral contacts, and needs assessed - and there is a stark difference between these data points for mothers vs fathers.
- DCF's goal is to keep children of color safely at home; Jeff intends to do this by 1) increasing the number of fathers referred for IFP services, and 2) use more services - enhance referrals and provider engagement.
- The strategy will be to refer fathers to IFP and FES services, and provide FES training to providers.
- Other potential implications include:
 - o Improving community perception of engagement
 - o Increased relative/kin placement
 - o Improved outcomes for families
- FES and IFP collaboration will get dads to the table.
- Jeff met with internal and external stakeholders, and he will use survey results regarding IFP sessions with dads vs moms.
- In terms of system implications, he hopes to see increased funding for father-centered services, established expectations for contracted providers, and quality assessments and data collection.
- Jeff asked for feedback and questions related to this initiative.
- Elisabeth Cannata oversees the IFP program at Wheeler and offered to do trainings together with DCF; Jeff agreed to take this info back.
- One person said they have had an influx of IFP referrals for dads - in his presentation, Jeff mentioned underutilization, and the member was curious about the time frame and what gaps were identified that IFP might help with. There has been a lot of alignment in Region 2, but they are concerned about duplication/overlap of services. Jeff explained his timeframe was the past year (2020) and currently, contracted slots are not full. The gaps include scheduling services around work hours, implicit bias, staff willingness to engage with dads, and the fact that the child welfare system is mainly made up of

women. The point about potential duplication is well-taken, and we do not want to overwhelm regions, so it is important to be strategic. In Region 4, there are only two FES providers, and they may be more flexible. He will continue to assess and consider feedback from dads to make sure they are engaged with as much as moms.

- Another suggestion was for Ken to share his role as "supercoach" with a father who has received services from the Department. This father could act as a consultant on the project, bringing their real-world experience into their recommendations. Ken explained that while the formal role as a supercoach is related to the LAMM program, Jeff could work with the FELT Team and consider this suggestion.
- One person asked whether there would be opportunities for the FES/IFP teams to address their own views on dads' involvement. Jeff responded that yes, there will be training for staff where they will discuss their biases, as well as join trainings, consultations, and informal discussions.
- Jeff shared his email and contact information in the chat and asked folks to please feel free to follow up with him if they had any questions. His email is JEFFREY.GOLD@ct.gov.

Vincent Russo and Legislative Advocacy

- The SAC was joined by Vincent Russo, DCF's Legislative Program Director. He led a discussion about techniques and strategies for creating legislative change.
- The Capitol is closed, and the Legislature is still working to adapt to a virtual environment.
- One of the most helpful tools is the CT General Assembly website: cga.ct.gov. Vincent went through the website and different tools that are available there.
- The Department tracks bills by the Children's Committee, as well as some relevant bills by Appropriations, Human Services, and Education.
- Every year, the Department does legislative updates on bills we are interested in. The CGA website is a dynamic website that changes on a regular basis. You can search for bills by number or public act, see the text of the bill, by whom it was introduced, hearing testimony, and any changes that were made.
- The website also includes a contact list for representatives and their website.
- The Statutes section includes all current state statutes - you can search a specific statute or browse it if you are unsure of the specific number/info.
- The Committee Pages is where you can sign up for testimony; because of the timing of the SAC meeting, this was not fully updated yet. Once it is up and running, you can look at the committee contact and testimony submission, along with information about the bill. Anything that has been through the committee will be here.
- The Assembly will adopt rules on how public hearings will be conducted. Vincent agreed to write this up and send it to the SAC.
- The Calendar allows you to take a look at the schedule and see the Zoom and YouTube information. There is a button that allows you to add a meeting to your calendar too.
- You can create an account in the Bill Tracking section, and then you can add bills to your list and track them.
- Vincent was asked whether he would be willing to review the SAC's annual report, given that it will likely be sent out to legislators. He was also asked whether he could let the

SAC know about realistic opportunities for family members to do advocacy work. This could be a learning opportunity for them, and the virtual environment may be less threatening. Vincent would be happy to review the report. He also explained that DCF is setting up and submitting a bill that includes a mention of the SAC. They could testify on that section and others to explain who the SAC is, what they do, etc. since people may be unfamiliar with the body. You can also submit virtual or written testimony, which may ease some folks' concerns if they do not want to vocally testify.

- Vinny explained that the public hearing process allows the public to express their views. One can testify orally by signing up, and they get about three minutes to ask unanswered questions. One can also submit written testimony, which is synthesized by the clerk and reviewed publicly. Anyone is welcome to express their thoughts on a bill. Because we are now virtual, one can sign up and then wait to log on. The virtual room will then open up and one can speak.
- Informal conversations are such a big lever, but obviously that is not feasible this year with the session being virtual.
- The Bill Tracker section also allows one to receive notifications on bills. You can request updates by the day or only when an action is taken.
- You can also look up representatives' legislative history to help prep for a conversation.
- The Find Your Legislators section allows you to look up your legislators by address.
- The Broadcast Media/CT-N livestreams the committees and all events. The streams of meetings are easy to access and watch.
- One SAC member asked about a bill that was passed a year or so ago that had the unintended consequence of creating issues insuring foster care. Are there any upcoming bills with unintended consequences? Vincent replied that he has not heard of anything so far that we anticipate may have consequences. With respect to the specific bill mentioned by the member, the bill removed the statute of limitations on child abuse investigations. DCF is aware of the insurance issue, as are legislators, and they are trying to correct the issue. We have not heard any recent updates on this issue.
- Ken pointed out that this emphasizes the complexity of Vincent's job; tracking everything that relates to us is challenging. Vincent added that at the time, it did not appear to impact much, and now we need to determine how best to address the challenge.
- Vincent closed by encouraging SAC members to bring their concerns to legislators. They want to hear from you and have a duty to respond. You can email or call, and there are many new legislators and staff shifting around. You can also call the general caucus number, which may be easier given the staff changes.
- Ken reiterated that we welcome your testimony, and DCF can help with training. Feel free to reach out and let us know about your experience with legislators.

Next SAC Meeting

- The next SAC meeting will be Monday, February 1st, 2021.