

Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

8/2/21

Attendees:

Ken Mysogland, Myke Halpin*, Sarah Lockery*, Dr. Irv Jennings, Deb Kelleher*, Jennifer Nadeau*, Lisa Girard, Michelle Sarofin*, Judy Eisenberg*, Suprena Shuler*, Chris Scott*, Stephanie Telford-Cotton
(* indicates a voting member)

Guests

Malcolm Blue, Brianna Fabiano, Elizabeth Duryea, Jonathan Jacaruso, Johanna Schmidt, Sergio Alvarez, Sharon Davis, Susan Cunningham, Vinny Russo

Minutes

- Sarah Lockery motioned to accept the July minutes and Judy Eisenberg. There were no objections, and the SAC accepted the minutes.

Membership

- An attorney named Megan has been helping Sarah and Myke with the process for having the Governor approve SAC members.
- Submitted applications: Sammi, Deb, Sarah, Elisabeth, Stephanie
- Pending applications: Chris, Amani
- The background check will be tabled until later.
- There are currently four vacancies: one child psychiatrist, one attorney, and two adult caregivers of children currently involved in the department.

SAC Member Advisement

RAC Reports:

- Region 6: Michelle
 - o Michelle reported that the RAC intentionally did not meet in July and will meet this Thursday (Aug 5).
 - o The CRP is still working on deciding an area into which they can do a deep dive. Once this is determined, they will present to the RAC.
- Region 5: Irv, Sergio
 - o Irv reported out that the RAC recently discussed the SFIT programs that will be closing as of the end of the year. There is confusion as to why this is being done and what will happen to the children still involved in those programs. There has been little clarity and no substitute program identified.
 - o A RAC member provider brought up the issue of ongoing programs (e.g., the Child Guidance Center) who are funded by a grant from DCF have not received any increase in grant amount aside from a modest cost of living adjustment, which has been insufficient. They feel there is a lack of funding to well-established programs due to the increase in newer programming.
 - o Sergio added that a RAC member also asked whether the CT Family First Prevention Plan and the draft Strategic Plan are available in Spanish.

- The RAC offered an implicit bias training to Mobile Crisis and IFP, which they received positive feedback on.
- The RAC has also been seeking volunteers for its racial justice subgroup. The group is in the process of forming; currently, they are unsure of the structure and are considering developing a change initiative.
- Region 4: Jennifer
 - There was no July meeting for the Region 4 RAC, so there was no report-out
- Region 3: Jon
 - The RAC did not have an official meeting, but several members had a planning meeting. The RAC will soon be shifting its meeting schedule to meet monthly, and they feel it is important to start planning now.
 - The RAC has also been focusing on youth/parent involvement. They also want to have a set agenda and clear expectations, and to continue offering activities and training.
 - Recently, Jen Avenia did a training on immigration practice.
- Region 2: Judy, Malcolm
 - There was no July meeting, but the RAC will meet on Friday.
 - They have focused on recruitment, the child safety practice model, and increasing interest.
 - The Health Equity Citizens Review Panel is underway and will become more structured.
 - The RAC co-chairs have been getting to know Dakibu Muley, the new Office Director for New Haven. They will be meeting every other month with him.
 - They are starting to plan a series of community conversations with parents and DCF representatives. They are hoping to have an in-person meeting but with the increase in cases, they are unsure whether it will be possible to have it in person.
 - Several RAC members will be participating in the fatherhood engagement work.
 - IFP and RTFT providers have been working with the systems division on their change initiatives. They will be doing data analyses and looking at the progress related to racial justice.
 - Malcolm gave Judy credit for all her hard work this summer. He also added that the RAC is looking to better partner with the YAB.
- Region 1: Suprena
 - Region 1 did not meet in July; they will be meeting on August 20.

SAC Member Reports:

- Sarah proposed a change to the agenda. Instead of the normal schedule, 9:30-10:30 will be dedicated to focusing on the RACs, in which RAC co-leads will focus on sharing resources, discussing issues, and helping one another. Sharon Davis will start regularly attending to learn more about regional resources for Family First implementation. Certain general members not affiliated with the RAC could then join at 10:30 if it helps their schedule.
- One member took issue with allowing certain members to join late, and others on the SAC agreed that this could make those members less connected with the regions. Sarah agreed to take out that part of the proposal.

- This also allows the Systems PDs to leave earlier if need be, as the sections dedicated to discussing Departmental information may include a lot of repeat information for them. They could skip that part if they so choose. Elizabeth Duryea took a moment to thank the SAC; Systems has been working on ensuring the RACs fulfill their statutory requirements to advise the Department, and some RACs have had longstanding engagement, while others have required rebranding. This feedback loop development has been in process. The SAC has been a great information source and a big value add to this process.
- A member asked Sarah to clarify how this might look (for example, will there be time limits by region or concern?). Sarah explained that it would start with a report-out, as usual, and then afterwards, the members could decide what issues to discuss. It might take a little time to evolve the timing, but it would likely flow organically.
- Sarah motioned to try out this cadence for September and the SAC agreed.

SAC Budget Reports

- Current balance: \$15,746.26
- Stipends are up to date.
- We have full confidence in being able to spend much of our budget on the 2022 retreat with Jerry Milner. Chris confirmed that he is in contact with Jerry and developing a plan for the retreat incorporating some of Jerry's ideas from a recent article and his consulting work, as well as the overlap with FFPSA (Family First).
- Ken asked Chris to provide information about making a referral to SUN Scholars. Chris explained that in the "About" section of the [SUN Scholars website](#), there is a [DCF Referral Submission form](#). After submission, the organization's Contract Liaisons will review the referral before passing the information along to Chris. Chris can also be contacted if folks have any questions. Chris recommended referring students as soon as possible, as there is a cap of 60 students and they are now at 40.

DCF Report

Legislative Updates with Vinny Russo

- This session was challenging with COVID-19. In addition to navigating the legislative process virtually, the cancellation of the 2020 session meant that this was essentially two sessions in one.
- The Department's [Legislative Summary](#) is available on the website. Vinny offered a review of several key bills, but there are many others included in this summary. Users can also use the links in the Table of Contents to find the final bill text. The summary covers all bills that will likely affect children/families and/or the Department.
- SB-2/Public Act 21-46: *An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children*
 - o This is a large behavioral health bill driven largely by the Children's Committee. It has several requirements, including creating a task force to study the needs of children, including behavioral health and education. The Commissioner has a seat on the task

force, and Linda Dixon was appointed to it. It is unclear when the task force will begin meeting.

- The legislation also requires the Department to update its Parents' Right to Know Brochure to explicitly state that parents have a right to an attorney throughout involvement, including at Considered Removal meetings. This will ensure that families know from the very beginning. DCF must also include a list of low/no-cost attorneys. DCF hopes to tap into the SAC's expertise to make changes and find services that are available to families. The Department will work with Monica Rams (Multicultural Affairs) to ensure the final version is translated into the most common CT languages, as it must be made available in the family's primary language. Ideally, the changes will be done by October 1, as that is the implementation date for the legislation. It will go through an internal vetting process and approval by the legal department. The SAC chose to earmark time in the September meeting to work on this. Ken also noted that the version created for October 1st can always be updated. He emphasized the need for this to be written in plain language that families can easily understand.
- The Department needs to develop a policy for virtual visits. This policy would be used in public health emergencies, or also if a parent/sibling is ill. Virtual visits are not equivalent to in-person visits, but they help maintain connections in the case of a health concern.
- The legislation requires DCF to create an app for mandated reporters that will allow them to text or use the app to report abuse/neglect by February 2022. It also requires the creation of an app that can be used by adolescents involved with DCF to be able to reach out with concerns.
- The Suicide Advisory Board and OCA will hold train the trainer sessions for QPR training (suicide prevention) in local districts.
- HB-6113/Public Act 21-64: *An Act Requiring the Provision of Information Concerning Child Sexual Abuse*
 - This bill has the Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children to create two sets of guidelines: 1) guidelines for coaches/volunteers about appropriate behavior and boundaries with youth athletes and 2) information for parents/youth on recognizing grooming techniques. Both sets of guidelines will be posted by December 1.
- HB-6417/Public Act 21-82: *An Act Requiring Background Checks for Certain Employees of Youth Camps and Youth Sports Coaches, Trainers and Instructors*
 - This extends background check requirements to youth camp employees and other workers who interact with children.
- HB-6510/Public Act 21-116: *An Act Requiring the Provision of Information Concerning Children's Behavioral and Mental Health Resources in Hospital Emergency Departments and Schools*
 - DCF will work with DPH, DMHAS, the Youth Suicide Advisory Board, and the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council (BHPOC) to create regional documents with information on behavioral health information and resources. These documents will be distributed to emergency departments and schools.

- Vinny thanked Elizabeth Duryea, Tim Marshall, and the Systems PDs for their help with this bill. CT is service-rich, but we have many access issues. The hope is that more hubs and expanded distribution will provide more guidance for families struggling with these issues. A directory can be very overwhelming to families, so this will hopefully ease stress and create a simpler process.
- Ken asked how families and FAVOR's Systems Managers will be involved in the creation of these resource guides. Vinny explained that the legislation does not specify, but DCF can certainly involve them in the creation.
- One SAC member shared that in their opinion, lists/pamphlets/directories are not very useful for families. Ken and Vinny agreed that information repositories are often not user-friendly and difficult to navigate. It is always better to have a live person assisting the navigation of services. In fact, this is a component of Family First; a Care Management Entity will take calls at a local level.
- A member also pointed out these guides may highlight unequal service distribution throughout the state.
- *SB-872/Public Act 21-140: An Act Concerning the Department of Children and Families' Recommendations for Revisions to the Statutes Concerning Children*
 - This is the Department's bill that makes a few statutory changes.
 - It streamlines the reporting requirements so the Department can submit federal reports to the legislature rather than redundant separate reports. Vinny has already sent these reports to the CT legislature.
 - It creates statutory language for QRTPs so that the Department can set up facilities for federal reimbursement. Requirements include standards for staffing, treatment, training/qualifications, court review, and documentation. The childcaring facility language is being changed rather than creating completely new standards. This part of the bill does not have a defined deadline, as it is conditional on Family First approval.
 - The bill also adds a healthcare professional to the SAC, effective October 1.
 - One SAC member asked how the legislation defines "healthcare professional" and Vinny clarified that it is open-ended; they need expertise in child health, but it could be a pediatrician, nurse, etc.
- *HB-6667/Public Act 21-174: An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC)*
 - This act shifts responsibility for education oversight in juvenile justice facilities to DCF. This does not mean that DCF is *providing* the education, only overseeing and ensuring it is proper education.
 - An implementation plan is being put into place, which will be reviewed soon. DCF will create a new division in the Department dedicated to this function. It is a big workload, so creating a new administrative unit will be necessary. OPM, the legislature, and the Governor have approved money in the budget to create this division. Oversight does not go into effect until October 1, 2022, but DCF has started planning for it now.
- Special Acts 21-15 and 21-2
 - These are the state budget and implementer.

- There is money to add nurses to Solnit North. DPH will also be licensing the Solnit hospital and the two PRTFs. DPH is working on drafting regulations.
- \$10.5 million in APRA funds will be utilized to implement the Children's Behavioral Health Plan. This money is the catalyst for implementation. This work has been strategic and collaborative. Michael Williams and JoShonda Guerrier will oversee this implementation.
- Ken gave a shoutout to Vinny for navigating such a challenging session. Legislative Affairs is not only necessary during the session, but all twelve months of the year. Vinny has led the way in developing relationships and building a solid foundation with legislators.
- The Department asks the SAC to start thinking about next year and what legislation we may want to see brought forward in the next session, which will run February to May.
- Vinny also reminded folks of the importance of submitting testimony. Testimony is key for legislators. Look at the lists of bills that Vinny sends out during the session and if you see one that you have an opinion on, it is important that you testify.
- Sarah asked that Sammi and Vinny connect to discuss their vision for the legislative subcommittee of the SAC.

Legalization of Cannabis: How will this affect DCF, providers, families, and the State of Connecticut?

- Ken Mysogland opened the discussion on cannabis legalization by emphasizing the importance of safe storage of medication (both prescribed and non-prescribed). Recently, Commissioner Dorantes participated in a [video](#) about the safe storage of medication and substances. DCF has seen seven children recently ingest a substance of some kind (four cannabis, three other substances). This is an opportunity to discuss the importance of keeping all substances out of reach of children.
- A member shared that the discussion in their circle is generally how legalization will impact teenagers. We must expand past adults - how do we message to youth?
- Vinny Russo explained some of the child safety focus of the legislation, which has provisions to try to keep cannabis away from children and adolescents. The Alcohol and Drug Policy Council is looking at its effect on kids. He recommends that if you have ideas for legislation, please let them know. The bill also specifies that a non-lapsing fund be created from a portion of the taxes; this fund would go towards drug prevention and treatment for youth and adults. There is also immediate funding that will go to these purposes, since the fund will take some time to be up and running.
- Prevention is very difficult if there is adult use in a home, felt one SAC member. Messaging is less effective if youth are used to seeing it openly. We need to be out-of-the-box with our thinking.
- Ken shared that although it is legal for folks 21+ years old, there are still laws regarding youth possession.
- One SAC member reflected that PSAs are often not effective. They recommended creating more youth engagement activities so that their time is properly filled. Research has shown certain windows of usage in which crime/deviance occurs, so an innovative idea is to occupy youth during those times. They offered to send studies on this. Another member seconded that

they often hear youth say they have "nothing to do." There is also a gap for tweens, who have fewer activities available to them than younger children or teens. They were interested in how the usage numbers are actually affected.

- Ken added that there is a vast array of views on cannabis and its medical usage, addictiveness, etc.
- Another member shared that the buzz on the street is a lot of interest in the dynamic with DCF. Others agreed that they are curious as to DCF's messaging for the Careline and prevention. To what extent will personal bias affect the Department? Will treatment include harm reduction or just abstinence? Ken clarified that the Department has known about the legislation for a while and discussed it before it became law. DCF has had discussions and read research from other states. Cannabis is a legal substance, and it does not become an issue unless it is negatively impacting children. Usage is not inherently a problem; it is only a problem if it negatively impacts a child. Addiction can require different levels of support. For foster parents, DCF will license people who use cannabis, depending on whether that usage would impact the children. Social workers must make judgement calls based on the situation, and context is key.
- One member expressed their concern with kids, particularly those in DCF care, using cannabis to self-medicate. They worried about youth with prescription medication going off that medication and using cannabis instead. They were particularly concerned about cannabis not bought from a dispensary, which could be laced with other substances (cocaine, fentanyl, etc.).
- There was some confusion on how to conceptualize cannabis. Some equate its legal usage with alcohol, while others refer to laws on smoking cigarettes.
- A member brought up children who have been removed from a household where there was a substance use concern and then placed with kin with the same issue. How does a worker assess risk? Does it vary by birth parent vs foster parent? Why remove a child from a home and place them somewhere with the same risk level? One person recommended forming guidelines for social workers to better understand risk. Ken referred to the examples of substance ingestion that the Department has recently seen. This is a grave concern--some had no pulse at one point. However, we must distinguish between accident and negligence. If a child is removed, DCF felt there was a safety issue, and that decision was approved by the court. As far as he remembered, none of the children who ingested cannabis were removed, as the assessment showed it was a mistake. In other circumstances, perhaps a child would be removed. DCF will not license folks who are actively using substances, but there are waivers for those who have in the past. DCF is also reviewing its Careline procedure, and service announcements.
- Another member asked what aftercare looks like after an ingestion. Does DCF follow up with the family to make sure they are okay? Ken explained that it is case-specific. The case may stay open, or it may close if there is low risk.
- Due to the pandemic, others' agencies have not had a chance to solidify its position on cannabis.
- Ken recommended discussing the topics at the RACs and also trying to learn more about educators' perspectives.
- Employment is another area affected by the decision. One member shared that their agency currently does drug testing as a condition of employment, but there is some disagreement in the agency on whether this should continue. Vinny added that workplaces can establish

cannabis-free rules, but they also cannot bar medical usage. It is important to keep that in mind.

- The bill itself is about 300 pages, but there is a summary that is only about 100 pages and is separated by subject.
- A member shared that before legalization, their agency received referrals related to medical usage, but the concern was usually in addition to other concerns (e.g., a child testing positive). In one case, they learned there was an underacknowledged mental health need, and once this was understood, that parent stopped using cannabis. This family taught the agency a lot about taking the time to assess, build trust, and evaluate their needs.
- It can be an uncomfortable conversation; folks have heard a lot of messaging about cannabis all their lives and it can trigger implicit bias.
- One member highlighted legalization's positive impact. Historically, the criminalization of cannabis has had a disproportionate impact depending on race and class. This shift will help folks focus on the impact and family rather than that initial stigma/bias.
- The group agreed to discuss this again at the September meeting.

Family First

- The draft CT Family First Prevention Plan is submitted to the federal government! Ken thanked Myke and Sarah for their involvement in DCF's workgroups. He also thanked the full SAC for their help in messaging and recruiting for the Parents as Experts Conversations.
- Chapin Hall, DCF's consultants, have said that CT's constituency engagement has been great.
- Caregivers who were interested in participating in more DCF events were forwarded to the RAC Co-Chairs for more engagement.
- Sharon Davis will be taking over for implementation of Family First, but DCF is still waiting on approval. Sharon has been excited to learn about CT's process and is looking forward to sharing more in the next few months. Sharon reports to JoShonda Guerrier, and Ken will be less intensely involved once implementation begins.
- Budget and funding for Family First are still being determined, so stay tuned.
- Over 400 individuals were involved in the process. Ken thanked everyone for their support.

Next Steps and SAC Assignments

- At the September meeting the SAC is statutorily obligated to conduct the annual review of DCF's budget.
- Members should also come with thoughts on what programs/legislation they would like to recommend to the Department (including behavioral health services). The RAC should have input here--what's on their minds?
- The SAC's next meeting will be on **Monday, September 13 from 9:30 am-12:00 pm.**