

## A Message from Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly



April is Child Abuse Awareness Month with the 2024 theme "***Building a Hopeful Future, Together,***" placing focus on creating a nurturing and supportive environment for children and families across our communities.

These values were embodied in ***Carlton White***, an employee with DCF for over two decades. "***A giant,***" with an "***infectious smile***" is how he was described while "***always putting others first.***" Carlton saw the potential in everyone, especially the adolescents and young adults on his caseload. Carlton passed away this month leaving a legacy of unconditionally serving others. "***May the Work I've Done Speak for Me,***" was performed at his funeral - a fitting tribute to an incredible person.



Who are the ***April 2024 Employees of the Month*** described as "***Amazing,***" "***Impeccable and Reliable,***" and a "***True professional?***" Read this month's "***Spotlight***" to see who was nominated in your workgroup!



Speaking of honorees, here is a picture of the ***March 2024 Employees of the Month*** with their certificates! Great job!

April is also ***Child Sexual Assault Awareness Month.*** Sexual abuse tends to be one of the most underreported types of child maltreatment yet may result in the most severe outcomes and impacts on children. Read about ***DCF Primary Investigator Richard Days*** and his "***quiet humility***" who was honored by the ***Department of Justice*** for his work protecting potential young victims of sex crimes.



***Children 0-5 years of age remaining safely at home*** is a priority in my Administration. This work requires continual focus, organization, and management of resources. In order to be successful, a ***Statewide Director of Child Safety Practice and Performance*** has been created. This new position, filled by ***Kelly McVey***, will play a critical role in assessing data on key safety indicators and developing interventions to improve upon our existing practice to keep kids safely at home.

I remain very proud of the work at the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. It was my honor this month to discuss our efforts on a panel entitled, **"Equip the flip to Advance Equity, Health and Well-Being"** at the **American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)** Convening.

Just days later, I facilitated a presentation in a Leadership Touchstones Workshop entitled, **"Effective Leaders are Talent Driven"** at the **Child Welfare League of America Conference** in Washington, DC.



Also, at CWLA, **Interim Deputy Commissioner Dr. Joyce Taylor** and **Bureau Chief of Child Welfare Tina Jefferson** presented a workshop entitled, **"How Building Our Safety Practice Model Has Strengthened Our Work with Mandated Reporters and Beyond."** Connecticut was well represented among our national partners!

**"The Link"** refers to the strong correlation between animal cruelty, child maltreatment, and other forms of interpersonal violence. Read about the strong collaboration amongst the **Department of Children and Families, Department of Agriculture** and state, regional, and municipal **Animal Control Officers (ACO)** to address this epidemic in our society.

Congratulations to **Jackie Ford** who received **Nexstar's 2024 Connecticut Remarkable Woman of the Year Award!** *"I find enjoyment and gratitude for myself by helping other people,"* she stated. Jackie works in the Bureau of External Affairs, developing excellent relationships with members of the community and was the visionary to create **"The Olive Branch Shop."** See her interview here: [Remarkable Woman](#)



Congratulations as well to **Maritza Acosta, Office Director in Meriden**, who received an **Outstanding Leadership Award** for her **"Above and beyond leadership and dedication to the Waterbury community,"** by the **Rivera Memorial Foundation Inc.** Maritza accepted the award with Legislators, local politicians, community leaders representing Law Enforcement and Education, grass roots organizations and private business owners in attendance along with her devoted family.

We are grateful for our partnership with the **University of Connecticut School of Social Work and Dean Laura Curran.**

We recently celebrated the graduation of two students, Ilene Garcia and Narda Portales, from the **DCF/UConn Child Welfare and Protection Track**. This program is designed to prepare UConn BSW Spanish speaking students with specialized knowledge and experience in child welfare and protection services to meet the needs of **Hispanic/Latino families served by DCF**.



The first of its kind "**UConn School of Social Work and Department of Children and Families Research Forum Symposium**" was also held. Special thanks to **Dr. Patricia Carlson** and **Tracy Davis** for an excellent opportunity to discuss research topics of interest and findings from studies already completed as a result of collaborative efforts between DCF and UConn. The best part of the day? The panel discussion with parents and youth with lived expertise! They were outstanding!

The **L.E.A.D. Mentoring Program Reunion** took place at Central Connecticut State University. Past and current program participants were invited to celebrate the **power of mentorship** and consider the future of leadership in our agency. The theme for this event was "**Reuniting the Past, Shaping the Future**". The afternoon featured remarks from the executive team, keynote speaker William Fothergill, and engaging activities aimed at bringing about reflection and planning for the future.



April is also **Safe Havens Awareness Month**. Passed in 2000, the law allows a parent, who does not believe they can care for their newborn, to **voluntarily give up custody of an infant age 30 days or younger** to the staff of an emergency room and remain anonymous. DCF will then place the baby in a pre-approved adoptive home. "**It was the sweetest thing. He was our little Valentine,**" is how one family describes the special Safe Haven boy placed into their home. Read more about the law in this month's "**Spotlight**".



Lastly, **General Counsel Susan Hamilton** and I represented Connecticut at the **Northeast States Judicial and Systems Partners Symposium**. Leaders from various child-serving stakeholders participated in presentations and facilitated discussions to **improve support to children and families across systems**.

A special thanks to each and every one of you for the efforts you put forth every day!