

A Glimpse into Commissioner Designate Jodi Hill-Lilly
(Confirmation Hearing Speech)



Good afternoon, Chairmen Duff and Concepcion, Vice-Chairmen Looney and Godfrey, Ranking Members Kelly and Yaccarino and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I'm grateful for the trust the Governor has placed in me to lead DCF and I'm thankful for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I first want to congratulate and thank my friend AND former Commissioner -Vannessa Dorantes. I've never met a more dedicated and compassionate leader. I've had the privilege of working side by side with her, as her Deputy, along with our incredible Executive Team for the past 5 years. I can say with confidence THAT, while we will always have more work to do, Connecticut DCF is moving in the right direction.

I'd also like to thank my family for being here today -my patient, supportive and loving husband and daughters, two of whom are here today. Thank you to my extended family, friends, and colleagues whom I call my "tribe" behind me and online. I love you all dearly for your support.

My goal today is to not only discuss my vision and professional experience as a 35-year employee and leader at DCF, but to also authentically articulate who I am.

I was born and raised in Windsor CT to Howard and Genevieve Hill, and I have four very loving and protective brothers. My parents, both of whom were only high school educated but worked hard and had high expectations. Although we lived in what was a middle-class town at the time, like many black Americans, we endured poverty, discrimination, and overall tough times. Those humbling times are what shaped the lens through I see many of the children and families we at DCF serve. Simply put, there but by the "Grace OF God go I". So, my primary mission in life is to give back.



And although my parents are no longer with me, I carry them in my heart knowing they would be so proud of me today.

Since my nomination, I have heard countless times----that the DCF Commissioner is the hardest job in state government. Many empathetically went on to say, "no matter what you do... you can't win." The truth is, when something tragic happens to our children, nobody wins.

DCF along with Child welfare agencies across the nation, are grappling with the complexity of this work. We keep children safe and support their families who face the extraordinary challenges life often brings. We are learning how best to reduce child maltreatment by providing preventative measures to interrupt behaviors leading to abuse and neglect.

While one child death is gut wrenching and beyond traumatic to all of us, many don't know that CT has one of the lowest child fatality rates in the country. We stand proud of our work.



DCF, under my leadership, if confirmed, will continue doing the absolute best to hold ourselves accountable for any egregious missteps AND we will celebrate many victories and accomplishments that never make the news, but give us our sense of purpose. I will always support and help the people who help the people...PARTICULARLY GIVEN THE WORKFORCE CRISIS.

As a leader, I will continue to develop DCF as a learning institution and build upon situations that teach us the deep intricacies of the work. I will listen; I will learn; I will partner; and I will act.

My ultimate goal is to continue the great work started and go deeper. We will remain responsive to the emerging needs (particularly post pandemic) of those we serve. Going forward I will continue to collaborate with the advocates and the legislators, providers, and sister agencies and, our foster and kin caregivers and our children and families.

We must have meaningful relationships with our communities because that's where our children and families live.

I will be paying particular attention to in-home services, specifically on the safety of children 0-5 years of age and our adolescents — both of which are very vulnerable cohorts.

I will seek to further develop the infrastructure for our children's behavioral health mandate and respond to this significant mental health and opioid crisis by creating a holistic and integrated approach to our role within the medical and behavioral health service delivery continuum of care.



In closing, I'll share an important interaction I had years ago I was 21 years old, and I remember excitedly telling my music professor Dr. Gardner, that I wanted to work for DCF. His reaction was both shocking and disappointing. He hung his head and said.... "Please, for the love of God Jodi, don't do it! You are much too positive to work for that agency and I'm afraid it will steal your joy."

While those words did not deter me from doing the work, I knew I was destined to do, I did listen to my mentor's caution and turned it into a personal challenge never to become bitter.

I sit here, 35 years later at a confirmation hearing to be the next Commissioner of DCF with joy in my heart and a never-ending love for the people I serve and those with whom I work. I am grateful for your consideration of my nomination and I'm happy to answer any questions from the committee.