

A Message from Commissioner Designate Jodi Hill-Lilly



"Let's go!" Countless times in my 35-year career I used this expression. On February 2nd, it took on a whole new meaning as I began my first day as Commissioner designate.

It is with great pride that I stand before you and **commit to listening, learning, and partnering** with the almost 3,000 DCF employees, sister state agencies, community partners and especially parents and youth with lived expertise in our critical work.

In the near future, a video message which includes an overview of my Administration will be provided.

We will always have work to do but I can say with confidence that over the past five years, **Connecticut DCF has been moving in the right direction**. My ultimate goal is to continue the great work we have started while we look to enhance the following:

- Safety practice and service provision with our 0-5 population
- Local partnerships
- Framework for Behavioral Health
- Supports to our staff across all Divisions



A few weeks ago, I took my first step in the confirmation process. Please see the [CT Mirror](#) article covering that hearing as well as the [CT-N video](#). I have also included my entire speech for you in this month's "**Spotlight on What's Right**" newsletter so you can get to know me even better, my beliefs, family and influences on my life's journey.

February is **Black History Month** with the **2024** theme, "**African Americans and the Arts**," celebrating the African American influence in the fields of music, performing arts, literature, language, fashion, and cultural expression along with many other ways.



Thank you to the staff and young men at Solnit North for their fantastic Black History Month celebration under the direction of Superintendent **Mike Rulnick** and with the organization of **Petisa Norwood**.



Black history is all our history, and I empowered the young men to consider themselves the future of our country and to become a change maker.

"We are in radical change in this world," stated **Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams**. "Pour into everyone, a true love for each other."



Read in this month's "Spotlight" the story of **Demani Brown** and her family entitled, "**All the days will get better.**" She speaks of her upbringing, losing her son to foster care and the "big, huge celebration" on that beautiful day her entire family was together once again.

Loneliness is unique to each individual. **Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz and Governor Ned Lamont** announced a social connection campaign this month to combat loneliness and social isolation in our state. Supports can be located by contacting 211 or www.connectingtocarect.org.

Keep watch over each other and just because our friend or loved one presents as "having it together" does not mean they aren't in need of social connection.

The mental health crisis is on the rise. **Dr. Frank Gregory and Dr. Linda Dixon** joined the **Lt. Governor and Senator Chris Murphy** as well as state and community leaders to participate in a roundtable discussion focused on the importance of social connection amongst Connecticut's young people.



The **DCF Juvenile Justice Educational Unit (JJEU)** supports better educational and life outcomes for high school aged youth in detention or residing in one of the state's 15 juvenile justice facilities. Read more about their mission, commitment of the staff and outcomes in this month's newsletter. See their outstanding presentation at the [Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee](#) where they also provided striking data on the improvements seen in academic performance due to their efforts!

Last week, **Program Director Ann Adams** served on a panel of Youth Fire setting national experts at the **National Community Risk Response Symposium** in Tennessee. Fire service partners were trained on partnering with Behavioral Health and Child Welfare to support youth.

Our Legislative session is fully engaged. Thank you to **Chief Administrator of Government Relations and Policy Vinny Russo, Legislative Director Mike Carone, Chief Fiscal Officer Melanie Sparks and Assistant Legal Director Kate Dwyer** for conducting key legislative research, development of testimony and for the long hours they are putting in at the state Capitol. Read "**DCF 2024 Legislative Priorities**" which provides an overview of DCF's legislative package this year.



Our statewide **Youth Advisory Board (YAB)** members are strong, insightful, and advocate for improving our system. They recently hosted their quarterly meeting with the Commissioner and Executive Team in New Britain. Thank you, **Sana Cotton and Calvin Mackey from Unashamed Inc.**, for inspiring our Transitional Aged Youth to participate in the development of a mobile app for those with lived expertise!

Thank you to our partners at **WFSB "Great Day at 9a"** for featuring **Director of Fatherhood Services Anthony Gay** this month to discuss the important role father play in the life of their children! See Anthony's interview here: [WFSB Great Day](#)

Stay safe and take care of yourself and your families!

