

## The Best of 2019-2024



It takes the collective efforts of all of us to support and empower families. Over the past 5 years, we have accomplished an incredible amount of work and success!

With great pride and gratitude - to each and every one of you - here are our best accomplishments.

### Significant Achievements

- Exited the 30+ year Juan F. Federal Consent Decree
- Lead Child Welfare Agency during a global pandemic and children's behavioral health crisis
- Commissioner Dorantes was Appointed Inaugural Chair of the Governor's Kids Cabinet
- Gained Federal approval of the State of Connecticut Family First Prevention Plan
- Elevated the voice of parents and youth with lived expertise in all areas of work.
- Featured on the NBC Today show and referred to as a "model for the nation" in our efforts to engage with families during segment entitled "[How Connecticut's Foster Care System is Setting a New Standard.](#)"
- Recognized for innovative practices in response to the Fentanyl crisis during the NBC Dateline report entitled "[One Nation Overdosed - Accidental Fentanyl Overdoses Rise.](#)"
- Nationally recognized for our work in promoting equity and racial justice across all aspects of our work.



### System Enhancements

- Created and implemented the ABCD Child Safety Practice Model internally and externally.
- Established the General Counsel position within the Department.
- Began implementation of Connecticut's Family First Prevention Plan in the areas of:
  - Qualified Residential Treatment Facilities (QRTP)
  - Kinship Navigation
  - Community Pathways Program
- Oversaw the creation of new behavioral health programs for children including:
  - Enhanced Care Coordination
  - Expansion of Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services to 24/7 statewide
  - Enhanced the services and eligibility of Access Mental Health
  - Establishment of the Urban Trauma Network
  - Development of the Urgent Crisis Centers, and Sub-Acute Stabilization Centers
- Published a *Spotlight on What's Right* monthly newsletter highlighting the collaborative work of the Department and community partners leading to successful outcomes for families.
- Transitioned staff to a telework environment.
- Launched the Quality Improvement Leadership Team (QuILT), a statewide interdisciplinary group focused on improving systems, practices, and outcomes through the review of data and implementation of improvement strategies.



- Established the Educational Professionals Investigation Unit (EPIU) leading to consistency and standardization in our investigations practice.
- Implemented the ChildStat process in each Regional Office leading to enhanced knowledge of data, trends and case practices leading to targeted strategies towards improved outcomes.
- Opened the DCF "Olive Branch" Shop where families were empowered to visit and select free gifts for their own children throughout the year.
- Implemented the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) for foster care collaboration.
- Established the Executive Fellowship Program for Senior Leaders at DCF, OEC and now DSS.
- Developed the Integrated Family Care and Support (IFCS) program for families with identified risk factors to receive ongoing support and case management without DCF involvement.
- Established the Educational Administration for Juvenile Justice Services Unit.
- Created and implemented the V.I.T.A.L. Practice Model to support Transitional Aged Youth (TAY).
- Established the Voluntary Care Management (VCM) program resulting in families gaining access to behavioral health supports without DCF involvement.
- Published guidelines where fentanyl use is suspected or known in families where children are present.
- Collaboratively decided upon, and are in implementation phase of the re-design of Therapeutic Foster Care, to be supported by an evidenced based clinical model.
- Created Quality Parenting Centers for families to visit with their children in a more normalized and comfortable setting.
- Established quarterly Senior Leadership Forums.



### **Accomplishments, Honors and Best-Case Practice Initiatives**

- Commissioner Dorantes participated in multiple roundtable discussions most notably with Vice-President Kamala Harris in New Haven, and at the White House in 2023 alongside various Federal leaders, to discuss the rippling impacts of child poverty, gun violence and emerging trends in child welfare and children's behavioral health.
- Collaborated and shared best practices in our work with the Governor's Office, sister state agencies, child welfare jurisdictions across the country, community partners and families with lived expertise.
- Engaged in regular communication with key legislators, Juvenile Court Administration, Attorney General's Office, Public Defenders Office, and Office of the Child Advocate to provide Department updates and resolve issues brought to their attention.
- Engaged with Legislators throughout the year with invitations to key Department activities, providing them DCF materials and improved timeliness of response to constituent questions.
- Reduced the number of children in care and custody by approximately 30%.
- Increased kinship care to almost 50% for children under 18 years of age.
- Sustained congregate care placements at or below 7%.



- Over 7,200 children reached permanency including:
  - 2,324 Adoptions
  - 1,794 Transfers of Guardianship
  - 3,117 Reunifications
- Established an anti-racist framework for the Department.
- Commissioner Dorantes survived cancer and used her influence to raise awareness that "Early detection saves lives."
- Published an Annual Racial Justice legislative report and recognized as a model state agency for institutionalizing equity work by the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health.
- Received consecutive annual approvals of the Department's Affirmative Action Plan by the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities each year of this Administration's submission.
- Commissioner Dorantes, along with a parent with lived expertise, were invited to speak by Casey Family Programs regarding empowering and collaborating with families at the African American museum in Washington, DC.
- Collaborated with the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to establish an escalation protocol for jointly involved cases.
- Conducted listening tours with the DCF Area Offices and Facilities along with local legislators.
- Actively participated in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Children and Family Learning Cohort leading to sharing our best-case practices with other states across the country including a joint presentation by the Commissioners Dorantes and now the US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona while in his prior role leading the state Department of Education.
- Presented our racial justice, youth engagement, therapeutic foster care, and community pathways strategies at the national Child Welfare League of America's 100th Anniversary conference.
- Implemented the five9 Careline phone system which allows greater responsivity to the public and quality assurance.
- Began Rapid Permanency Reviews hosted by Casey Family Programs.
- Collaborated with UCONN to establish Spanish Speaking BSW cohorts at the School of Social Work.
- Commissioner Dorantes served as Co-Chair of Connecticut's Alcohol and Drug Policy Council along with DMHAS Commissioner Nancy Navaretta.
- Reinforced with employees the importance of establishing a healthy work/life balance and the utilization of internal support including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Commissioner Dorantes served as Vice Chair of the Governor's Council on Women and Girls with Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz.
- Careline Investigator was honored by the US Attorney's Office for outstanding public service during a sexual abuse investigation.
- Conducted consistent meetings with the Children's League of Connecticut (CLOC) and Non-Profit Alliance to ensure consistency of information and problem solving.



- Remained in frequent contact with leadership from state employee labor unions to answer questions and clarify operational procedures for their members throughout the Department.
- Coordinated the Leadership Academy for Social Work Supervisors, Leadership Academy for Middle Managers, and the nationally recognized formal Mentoring program to develop staff in preparation for succession planning.
- Commissioner Dorantes participated in a roundtable discussion with Admiral Rachel L. Levine Assistant Secretary for Health for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- Legal Division implemented a policy and practice to review, on an emergency basis, Central Registry decisions that were barriers to placement of children with relatives and kin.
- Updated Careline script resulting in an increase in mandated reporters identifying their race leading to a better understanding of structural and institutional racism impacting the child welfare system.
- Implemented Restorative Justice practices in STAR programs.
- Fiscal Division established guidelines to increase the engagement of grass roots, minority-led community providers to the DCF service array.
- Created a Public Service Announcement regarding Safe Storage of substances intended for adult use.
- Established framework to conduct Virtual Administrative Hearings.
- Piloted Family Support Liaisons in three Waterbury schools with high report volume.
- Expanded the Juvenile Court Transformation Zone.
- Commenced the automated employment Background Check process at Careline.
- Deputy Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly was named co-chair of the National Partnership on Child Safety.
- Created the frameworks and designs for the Caregiver Practice Model and Kinship Navigator.
- Selected as a "Trailblazer" in a national initiative led by AECF and CSF regarding Congregate Care work.
- Increased capacity of Child Abuse Pediatricians to provide expertise and consultation to Department staff.
- Commissioner Dorantes served as the most recent past Chair of the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators which ended in December 2023.
- Re-aligned leadership structure in the Area Offices resulting in Administrative Program Directors overseeing functions/practice resulting in greater consistency across the state.
- Promoted and hired a new leadership team in the Fiscal Department and expanded their roles given the significant increase in Federal funding to support programs during post pandemic recovery.
- Fully established on-line portal at the Careline for all mandated reporters to make nonemergent reports of suspected child maltreatment.
- Established a TEXT chat line for youth within the Bureau of External Affairs.





- DCF Senior leaders presented nationally regarding topics such as: Connecticut's Quality Parenting Initiative, Communications Strategies, Child Safety, Strategic Planning, Racial Justice, and more.
- DCF personnel, including parents with lived expertise, represented the Department at the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors' Pathways to Partnership New England Regional convenings on an annual basis, to learn more about how our system can ensure parents feel more included, heard, and respected.
- Selected by Casey Family Program's Policy Division to host a group of congressional staffers to share highlights of how federal funding is put into use in Connecticut.
- Legal management collaborated with the Attorney General's Office on all stages of child protection appeals, including providing feedback on briefs and participating in moot arguments.
- Hired new Superintendents for both the Solnit North and Solnit South campuses and realigned leadership teams at each.
- Senior staff were invited by the US Administration for Children and Families Associate Commissioner Aisha Schomburg to attend the Think of Us conference in Washington DC.
- Annually held "Connecticut Adoption Day" where children achieved formal permanency both during in-person and remote hearings thanks to collaboration with Judicial Partners.
- Allocated financial support to Transitional Aged Youth (Tay) for daily living expenses, car maintenance, repairs, insurance, and other emergent costs.
- Hired new staff in key Central Office positions such Chief Administrator of Government Relations and Policy, Chief Fiscal Officer, Clinical and Community Consultation Administrator, Director of Communications, Legislative Liaison, Educational Administrator for Juvenile Justice Services, Administrator of Children's Behavioral Health Community Service System, Systems Administrator, Director of Organizational Wellness, inaugural Statewide Fatherhood Director and established a dedicated Director of Immigration work.
- Dispersed over \$140,000 on milestone activities for youth in our care and custody.
- Conducted follow-up interviews with over 100 young adults who had transitioned from care following the pandemic moratorium to ensure their needs were met and they were connected to resources.
- Partnered with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to utilize their mobile van to provide IDs and licenses for eligible youth in care.
- Moved the Meriden Area office to a new location and worked with Department of Transportation to ensure families who need to visit the office can do so safely through public transit.
- Commissioner Dorantes participated in a roundtable discussion with Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, Senator Chris Murphy, Representative Jahana Hayes, Representative Rosa DeLauro, and community providers to discuss HHS funding in the recently passed Gun Violence Prevention Bill.
- Successfully opened the Waterbury Office Annex to reduce overcrowding conditions in that office.



- Expanded the Special Qualitative Review process to include the Safe System Improvement Tool (SSIT) under the National Partnership for Child Safety as an important part of our Safe and Sound Practice Model.
- Conducted Learning Forums to identify themes from child fatalities, best-case practices and develop strategies for continued work with vulnerable populations.
- Production of newsletters, by Regional Offices and Divisions, highlighted their unique contributions to the Agency.
- Meriden Social Worker provided the 2022 commencement address at the University of Connecticut and Commissioner Dorantes delivered the keynote at the UCONN School of Social Work graduation twice during her tenure.
- Staff across multiple Divisions were interviewed by print, radio, and television media regarding their expertise.
- Administration of the Careline CAPTA portal received national recognition.
- Solnit North Clinical staff produced a research paper in collaboration with a local University.
- Governor Ned Lamont hosted youth in care during non-pandemic years at the Governor's residence around the holidays.
- Staff were honored by the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) for the "First 100 Plus Breakfast and Awards Ceremony."
- Honored staff who made unique contributions to the Agency and community with the annual William Rivera Humanitarian Award and Janet E. Williams Award.
- Casey Family Programs sponsored Riverside County leaders from the state of California to understand more about our Careline, Differential Response System, Prevention Framework and Behavioral Health System along with many other aspects of our work.
- Established "Post Consent Decree Workgroups" to provide recommendations for practice evolution.
- A Transitional Aged Youth was selected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the 2023 Cohort of Jim Casey Fellows!
- Celebrated the Wilderness School's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary including recognizing the heroic efforts of three staff to maintain the safety of youth while being attacked by an animal in the wilderness.
- Commissioner Dorantes maintained supportive outreach to law enforcement and local leaders in the aftermath of a tragedy in their communities.
- Staff across Divisions took part in a panel discussion "Working Together for Better Outcomes" at the 2023 ISM+PHSA Education Conference and Expo produced by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) in Florida.
- Commissioner Dorantes presented along with the Bureau Chief of External Affairs at the Casey Family Program's Leadership Academy in Seattle, Washington highlighting the importance of relationships in support of our work.
- Connecticut DCF's work was recognized at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect with the 2023 theme - *"Doing Things Differently: Moving from the Challenge to the Change."*



- DCF's Outreach Coordinator received the 2023 Children's Bureau Champion Award for building Community Capacity.
- Commissioner Dorantes along with senior level staff presented at a Tri-Bar forum for the Minnesota Bar Association on the evolution of Connecticut's Child Welfare System.
- Reinforced cross-reporting protocols with the Department of Agriculture which result in the protection of both children and animals within our communities.
- Developed and implemented the "CT FOSTERS: Mobilizing Love - Unifying Families" logo and branding in the Foster Care Division.
- Expanded the SUN Scholars program to assist TAY youth in post-secondary education.
- Collaborated with two advocacy groups CIRI (CT Institute for Refugees & Immigrants) and IRIS (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services) to discuss our work with undocumented families and unaccompanied minors.
- Bureau Chief of External Affairs presented a webinar to a national audience of QPI jurisdictions on how excellent parenting sustains lifelong family ties.
- Commissioner Dorantes was a consistent guest on WTNH's "The Capitol Report" during Foster Care and Adoption month.
- Quarterly Leadership Forums brought together senior leaders across all Divisions to highlight best practice and develop strategic plans.
- Partnered with the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) to have a "candid conversation" to discuss our work with education professionals including impact of mandated reporter laws on educators, systems, and parents.
- Commissioner Dorantes took part in a panel discussion regarding women breaking barriers at the Executive Leadership LLC.'s *Women in Leadership* conference.
- DCF's racial justice work was featured on NBC Connecticut's [Color in Connecticut](#) segment.
- Commissioner Dorantes provided the keynote address at the Mahoning County Division of Children's Services Diversity Committee conference in Ohio!
- Production continued the DCF "Doors to Hope and Healing" cable access television show, reaching over 60,000 households in New Britain, Avon, Farmington, and surrounding towns.
- Academy for Workforce Development, in collaboration with the Office of Organizational Development, produced "Real Talk: A Podcast on Well-Being" to promote employee health and wellness.
- Adoption story of "Nate the Great" was featured in People Magazine along with all major news outlets in Connecticut, and Good Morning America.
- A Waterbury staff member received the first "Yocasta Del Rosario Memorial Award" for compassion towards others awarded by the Waterbury Office.
- Established a monthly segment on the WFSB "Great Day at 9:00 a.m." show to discuss updates at DCF and highlight Agency successes.
- Foster Care Director along with other staff presented during the Youth Law Center's QPI Champions Conference.



- Established "Best Dad by Par" golf event hosted by the Department to underscore the importance of a father in the life of a child including the unique role of foster fathers.
- Commissioner Dorantes and a Senior Administrator took part in panels at the Child Welfare League of America Conference (CWLA) on entitled "*Operationalizing a Community Pathway to Prevention: Partnering with Families to Strengthen Communities.*" And "*How Leaders and the Media Can Transform the Narrative About Child Welfare.*"
- Established the Academy for Community Partners to train community members on DCF policies, procedures and best-case practices.
- Launched a targeted enhancement of our Faith-Based Initiative with 30 Pastors throughout Connecticut to recruit foster parents within the Queen Esther foster care recruitment project and implement the "Hands Off" campaign to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Remained a leader across the country for our work with survivors of child sex trafficking and collaboration with Law Enforcement.

### **Response During the Global Pandemic**

- Balanced the mission critical work of the Agency with the health and safety of our workforce and the children and families we serve.
- Mirrored the Governor's Unified Command structure and cadence to hear from Senior Leaders in real time.
- Provided written guidance and video recorded messages weekly to all staff, including community partners, clarifying new pandemic procedure and best-case practice procedures.
- Issued a moratorium on older youth being discharged from care resulting in approximately 200 TAY receiving continued support.
- Engaged in regular pandemic conference calls with key legislators, Juvenile Court Administration, Attorney General's Office, Public Defenders Office, and Office of the Child Advocate to provide Department updates and resolve issues brought to their attention.
- Deployed approximately 3,000 tablets, including approximately 600 in one week alone, along with other technology leading to staff teleworking.
- Conducted virtual listening tours with the DCF Area Offices and Facilities.
- Engaged with children and families using innovative and creative methods via remote technology such as Face Time and Microsoft Teams.
- Creatively provided uninterrupted treatment to youth with complex needs on our Solnit North and Solnit South campuses while mitigating virus transmission.
- Established triage procedures, including proper PPE use, when in-person response was required due to a circumstance that could not be resolved remotely.
- Continued to monitor services to vulnerable populations such as children with specialized needs and children and families in disproportionately impacted communities.
- Established the "*When it Builds Up, Talk it Out*" campaign which included a phone line staffed by community providers that parents could call when in need of support.
- Conducted continuous contact tracing processes guided by DCF Medical Director of all COVID-19 positive diagnosis for caregivers, youth and DCF staff.





- Presented twice at the Governor's Council on Women and Girls Health and Safety Subcommittee, co-chaired by Commissioner Dorantes, regarding resources available to support Connecticut children and families including access during the pandemic.
- Discussed during the Alcohol and Drug Policy Council (ADPC), co-chaired by Commissioner Dorantes, services and support available across Connecticut during the pandemic.
- Developed and regularly updated a [COVID-19 website](#) which has resulted in over 75,000 unique individuals accessing supports for children and families.
- Established a specific e-mail address for internal DCF staff and external partners to ask specific questions relating to the pandemic: [DCF.COVID-19@ct.gov](mailto:DCF.COVID-19@ct.gov).
- Produced a daily DCF News with information regarding supports available for children, families and staff as well as highlighting positive efforts of the workforce.
- Established a foster parent contact database so communications could be quickly and consistently delivered and confirmed backup childcare plans with each caregiver during the pandemic.
- Outreach occurred daily from our Licensing Division to private providers caring for our children in congregate care facilities and program leading to trouble-shooting concerns with maintaining virtual connections to the families they serve.
- Conducted two virtual town halls for contracted and credentialed providers. Followed up on inquiries from contracted and fee-for-service credentialed providers from our Fiscal Department.
- Solicited PPE need from nonprofit provider community and submitted through the Essential Support Function process and supplemented their stockpile when necessary.
- Presented the Department's COVID-19 planning on a Casey Peer to Peer national call with over 200 representatives from jurisdictions across the country.
- Conducted two webinars with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and established guidelines for assessing families remotely and criteria for educational neglect in a remote environment.
- Held two "Virtual Adoption Days" where over 60 children achieved formal permanency including one where family members and friends participated from from at least two different countries.
- Engineering Division conducted three tabletop simulations that proved critical to efficient pandemic related response.
- The Academy for Workforce Development delivered a catalog of virtual curricula.

