

Commissioner's January 2024 Message



I still remember "the call." It was December 2018, and the phone rang while I was driving to pick up my daughter. It was a number I did not recognize but I picked it up anyway.

The voice on the other end said, "Hey Vanessa, it's Ned Lamont..."

He offered me the opportunity to serve as the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families.

...To become the first

African American Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families.

Never could I have imagined 5 years later that my journey leading you would have been as challenging, grueling, emotional, and rewarding.



Please read in this month's *Spotlight* a piece called "A Note to My 22-year-old Self," which tells the story of how I came to DCF and my thoughts on ending an amazing 31-year career. You will read about that one unique individual who came into my life and is responsible for me being in front of you.

Often, I refer to social work as "**heart work**." With sincere gratitude, I thank every one of you for the compassion, dedication, and tireless efforts you put forth every day on behalf of Connecticut's children and families.

What we have accomplished is nothing short of remarkable. Take a few moments to read "*The Best of 2019-2024*" in this month's *Spotlight* to see what our collaborative efforts have accomplished. It took all of us - at every level and position - to achieve these results across every Area Office, Facility & Central Office Division, Careline ... and yes, even in the Wilderness School. 😊



Governor Ned Lamont has provided me with unconditional support. He has been an incredible boss, and I will always cherish the time we have spent together.

He empowered me, listened during the most challenging of times and had truly supported me and our mission unconditionally. The Governor's deep concern and commitment to Connecticut's families is evident in each interaction.

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz has elevated my voice (along with other women leaders particularly) while I led this Agency and various

Councils. She promoted opportunities to impart knowledge and subject matter expertise to others. As she continues to develop the next generation of leaders, I am forever appreciative of the opportunity to have worked alongside her.



There is expected collaboration across Commissioners and Executive branch agencies to maximize our effectiveness to all of CT's citizens. I have had the privilege to exercise those relationships far beyond interactions within Health and Human Services. To all of the Commissioners (past and present) of the Lamont Administration -- **You are amazing, and I am privileged to have linked arms in service with you!**

I have very much enjoyed visiting with members of our workforce as I've traveled around the state for this 'Farewell tour'. Your decorations, stories of reflection, laughter and tears have meant more than I can put into words... Our unexplainable connection will always remain in my heart.

Hundreds of images of our time together over the years can be seen in this slideshow: [Commissioner Dorantes Over the Years.](#)

See pictures of visits to our Solnits and Regional Offices, openings of QPCs and UCCs, a roundtable discussion with the Vice-President and trips to the White House. You will see me representing Connecticut & the Department during countless events-- interacting with incredible people.

No one does this work alone. While DCF is 'the child protective



services *agency*, we act within the broader child and family well-being **system**'. Our partners - across all three branches, education professionals, law enforcement, behavioral health personnel, medical community, private providers, federal representatives, labor unions - and countless others collectively work **together** and for that -- I am eternally

grateful.

Most importantly, we partner with parents, young people and families.

To the children and caregivers that I have served over the past three decades- it has truly been an honor. My work on your behalf is not done and is now moving to a national perspective where I will bring with me your courage, resilience, and wisdom to other jurisdictions around the country.





We often say that a picture is worth 1,000 words. This picture exemplifies 5 years of memories and so very much tells our story.

During a global pandemic, Social Worker **Sylquia Rodriguez** from the Hartford DCF Office knew that a child placed into care was celebrating her birthday. In-person contact was limited -- with PPE protection, she drove to the foster home. After putting the gift on the front porch, Sylquia wished 'Happy Birthday' - through the window - and made sure a little girl's special day was in fact, special.

That is the DCF I know and will always love.