

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.

A note to my 22-year-old self...



As you contemplate leaving your first “big girl” job as Social Services Director for your church’s 110-unit elderly housing complex, know that the sage wisdom of the elders you meet there will stay with you throughout this journey.

You will listen intently as a guest speaker in one of your last psychology elective courses talks about the **CT Dept of Children and Youth Services**. The guest, who referred to herself as **Patti**, explains what Social Work is and what Social Workers DO at DCYS. You will feel the urge to want to learn more about that.

There is no such thing as a chance encounter Ness... Pay attention to every person you meet.

You cross paths with this Patti again as she leads the interview when you go to apply for a job with that Dept. That very kind woman makes you even more confident that this is something for you to explore.

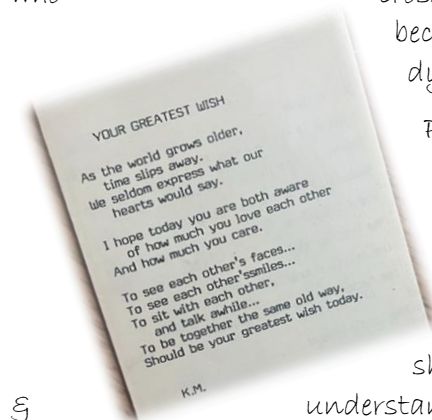
Patti would become your first supervisor and her kindness will be matched with a stern expectation that all of us — treat families with respect, dignity and to leave them better off than the crisis that brought them to our attention.



You will be hired just after the Department had been sued and at 22 years old, someone thinks you can help — I know it sounds crazy but trust me...it strangely works out!

Although you don’t know it yet - that Patti person will leave an impression on EVERY person who

crosses through the Waterbury office doors— These are people you become connected to as **FAMILY**. (You & K Bosley will be a dynamic duo like no other!)



Patti would see something in you back then and will write in your first evaluation.... She will refer to you as:

UNFAILINGLY COOPERATIVE AND WELL SUITED FOR PROTECTIVE SERVICE WORK.

Baby social worker Vanessa — listen and watch ... The children and families you are assigned will need you to show-up for them. **KM** will teach you the importance of kinship understanding young people who identify as **lgbtqia+** & **Little Mr.**

Prince will make sure you pay attention to peanut allergies!

During your first year working there you will marry your soulmate-- who you meet in driving school ... Yup ... he’s kept your motor running ever since 😊...



You will become a Husky & earn a master's degree. Your mom, who will always be your **biggest** cheerleader will not be happy that you skip your MSW graduation.

Karma taps you -- twice as commencement keynote for the **UConn School of Social Work** (... always listen to your momma!)

During both of those graduations you get to have a front row seat as several DCF staff and many of your former students earn THEIR advanced degrees...

By students — I should tell you that for 15 years you followed in your mom's footsteps in the front of a classroom. You will teach 7 different elective & core social work courses! That Patti—has become way more than your boss... She is with you teaching at Central too (not by coincidence— as another means of support).

You beam with pride as your career grows and you cross paths with many of these students along the way. You learn just as much from them as you would teach them. They will in turn make their mark on the lives of children, families & systems.

That career path, Vanessa will have you meet and work alongside some of **the most selfless people making incredible sacrifices** on behalf of CT's children...

Speaking of kids, your social work tendencies show up as you and your soulmate volunteer for over a decade in your community. You will find yourself coaching and judging cheerleading (pay attention as cheer becomes an important social work metaphor & touch point for more close connections) You eventually formalize that commitment to serve by **LINK'ing** arms with some amazing civic-minded women and pledge service to all mankind in the illustrious sisterhood of **Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.**



Your own family will also grow to include two of the most awesome daughters you could ever imagine - they remind you of yourself and your sister in similar yet different nuances. And the twins will grow up to graduate college on the **SAME** day in two different states!

How'd you make **that** work? This job makes everyone associated with it incredible problem solvers...

That problem solving would take you from Waterbury to Torrington (watch out for the moose and tons of snow as you will lead in the 44 towns of Connecticut's northwest region)

Vanessa, you will see DCF change and adapt to the changing needs of society alongside more and more amazing people enriching the lives of others who just need someone to believe



in them. **THERE WILL BE TOUGH TIMES** -- SEPARATIONS ARE THE HARDEST -- Separating people who are not quite cut out for this work and **family separation** -- **ALWAYS HARD** -- always consequences. You will do so with the greatest of care.



In 2019, you will get the shock of your life when CT's governor would tap YOU to be DCF's Commissioner-- You will be incredibly nervous -- He WILL support you unconditionally and relentlessly Vanessa in one of the hardest jobs in state government-- as it should be.

You will become DCF's first Black Commissioner as your Governor understands that representation matters, and diversity of perspective is imperative because you and **ONE** DCF are serving **ALL HUMANS** in our state ... (⊗ an occasional 4-legged resident!)

That soulmate of yours will regularly remind you EVERY moment of your life has prepared you for this Herculean task you've taken on (... incidentally, **not one** of those moments prepared you to lead over 3000 people through a global pandemic!)



During those 5 years you will have to combine everything you've learned, taught, saw, imagined, or assessed with the most fearless Executive Team that had your back (and your FRONT) from day 1. You will be appreciative of Senior Administrators and managers across DCF (many of whom you've watched grow into absolutely incredible servant leaders!) These people not only survive this perilous time--DCF will **rise to the occasion** --time and time and time again despite the complexities families are facing -- The staff members you lead understand their assignments and execute it very well.

DCF will actually exit the expectations of that lawsuit you were hired as a result of --a consent decree after 3 decades and will emerge **stronger than ever** because of the relationships built along the way. You will rely on creative co-commissioners within HHS and beyond, and with many many partners across the legislative and judicial branches.... You will have your voice heard from the Nutmeg state to the **White House**-- and across national media... Sharing the Connecticut way.

Vanessa, you have learned that DCF does nothing alone and with help of law enforcement, education & healthcare professionals, and some of the **strongest** provider agencies in the country-- who all evolve together to meet the needs of families.

Vanessa listen, as parents will tell you (sometimes through their hurt & pain) how to meet their needs). Continue listening **closest** to the young people as they launch from foster care, their unabashed truth is **REAL TALK**. You will push to do right by them.



You will develop relationships with media partners who will report on how hard this work is and you will be challenged — A LOT. You will put yourself in between the 'venom' and your workforce. You know what it's like because **you** have walked in their shoes.... The work will never be easy. You will often be second-guessed after the fact. You & they will stay strong in our purpose & intent.

*By the way — Patti is still with you calling or texting you EVERY single day these last 5 years to make sure you are ok.

The work will bring you through some of the most incredible experiences that positions CT as one of **THE BEST** child welfare jurisdictions in the country —so much so you get to end an amazing 31-year career in public service and try your hand at foundation and philanthropy work.



You will leave the agency in more than capable hands as you have prepared the seat for the **Next Up-Best Up...**

You will tell our story our way and will do your absolute best to show everyone the DCF **you** know and for that you will be truly honored, blessed, and grateful.

Remember to thank your mom for making sure you grew up to **know** you will do great things and don't forget to thank **Patti** for introducing you to this incredible ride!

Signed,

Me ~

Feb. 1, 2024



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.

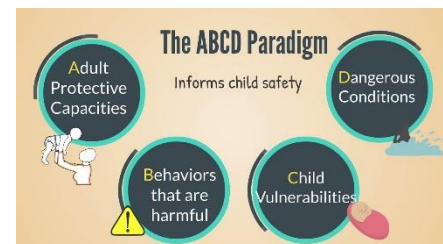
Significant Achievements

- 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 50th 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 23rd 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.
- 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.

