

Commissioner's February 2025 Message



THANK YOU for an **AMAZING** first year as Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families!

In the first 12 months, we established the **Employee of the Month Award**, placed greater focus on the **0-5 and Transitional Aged Youth (TAY)** populations, **enhanced** our **Behavioral Health and Prevention** frameworks all while working out of a staffing crisis.

This work cannot be done alone, and I remain **grateful for the relationships established** with our sister **state agencies** and **community partners** across Connecticut.

I could not be **prouder** to work with such a **great group of people** - **inside and outside** - of the Agency.

February brings **Black History Month** celebrations where we recognize the contributions of Black people throughout our country. We still have much work to do in **addressing disproportionality and disparate treatment** of those in the Black and Brown communities as they remain overrepresented in our systems.

With great pride, I took part in **Black History** events hosted by **Solnit North** and the **Central Office Diversity Action Team**!

The Department's **2024 Racial Justice Report** on Data, Activities and Strategies was recently submitted to members of the **Connecticut legislature**. You can access it here: [2024 Racial Justice Report](#)



Listening Tours continued this month with visits to the **Hartford** and **Norwich Area Offices**. The **Willimantic Office** hosted the quarterly **Statewide Youth Advisory Board** meeting. My heart is filled by seeing all of you and talking with our **resilient, insightful and inspiring youth**!

A **shout out** one more time to the **January Employees of the Month**! Who has been nominated to receive the **February Award**? Read to see who is described as the "poster board for the Department," "always going above and beyond," and committed to "all things fathers."

"Supporting Families Impacted by Substance Use and the Evolution of CAPTA" was the title of a national presentation given by myself and **Commissioner Nancy Navarretta** from the **Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)**. Along with **Chief Administrator of Behavioral Health and Wellness Dr. Nicole Taylor**, we highlighted our CAPTA portal, supports for those experiencing a substance use disorder and the importance of lifting the stigma as seeking support is a true sign of strength.

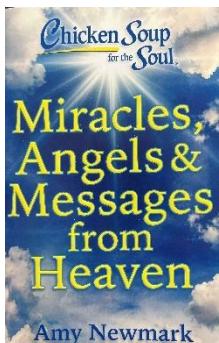




Behavioral Health Clinical Manager Christa Rider presented DCF's collaborative work towards protecting **survivors of child sex trafficking** at the **2025 Federal Preparedness Workshop** hosted by the **Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation** and presented by the **National Indian Gaming Commission**. Topics included Human Trafficking, the Opioid epidemic, Active Assailant and Best Practices in Emergency Management.

DCF Employee and Foster Parent Elizabeth Saez appeared on the **WFSB Great Day at 9a** segment to discuss being honored as the **2024 "Elevate and Celebrate"** honoree for her extraordinary dedication to foster care advocacy given by the **Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) of the Youth Law Center**. Watch her here: [WFSB Great 9a](#)

Congratulations to **Program Supervisor Jenny Vesco** who co-authored an article entitled, **"Economic Insecurity and Families Involved with Child Welfare: The Pivotal Role of Local Community Support"** with our partners from the University of Connecticut and Wheeler Clinic. This work can be found in the textbook, **"Child Neglect, Inequity, and Poverty: Practice Innovations, Concrete Resources and Justice"** published by the Child Welfare League of America. Read the article here: [CWLA Publication](#)



Community Outreach Coordinator **Jackie Ford** published a short story in the newest edition of **"Chicken Soup for the Soul: Miracles, Angels, and Messages from Heaven."** Read it here: - [Double Play - Chicken Soup for the Soul](#)

The **Legislative Session** has begun! Please watch the [Committee on Children](#) hearing that recently took place on 2/20/25 where I and some of the **Agency's subject matter experts** testified on our bill. As a reminder, if you are contacted by a **Legislator** with a question or request, please notify **Chief Administrator of Government Affairs and Policy Vinny Russo** at

Vincent.Russo@ct.gov

Legislative Program Director Mike Carone spoke in the **House Chambers** to students from his alma mater - **Trinity College** - about how his past education and work experience have prepared him for his current job collaborating with the Connecticut legislature. **Thank you, Mike!**



Prom season will soon be upon us! We are accepting **donations** for gently used prom gowns, men's suits and tuxedos as well as shoes and accessories at the **DCF Community Center in the Buckland Hills Mall** Please contact Jacqueline.Ford@ct.gov to donate and watch her here on WFSB: [DCF Supporting Youth](#)

Congratulations to **The Bridge Family Center** for opening **"Mosaic House"** a Quality Parenting Center located in Cromwell and serving youth and families from the Middletown Area Office. **We appreciate your partnership!**

A **Commissioner's Monthly Video** will now be provided to keep you updated on Agency operations. Watch **February's** again here: [Commissioner's February 2025 Video.](#)

Thanks to each and everyone of you for all that you do!

