

Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI) Council Meeting

Meeting Summary * March 27, 2023

Members in Attendance:

Andrea Barton Reeves, Chair, Department of Social Services (DSS)
Dr. Kari Adamsons, University of Connecticut, Human Development & Family Sciences
Commissioner Beth Bye, Office of Early Childhood
Tanya Barrett, United Way of CT
Michael Bartley, Department of Labor
Paul Bourdoulous, Judicial Branch Support Enforcement Services
Daniel Cargill, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Deputy Commissioner Sharonda Carlos, DOC
Rose Colon (for Lucy Potter), Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Diana DiTunno, DSS Office of Organizational & Skill Development
Joseph DiTunno, Judicial Court Support Services Division (Domain 4 Committee Co-Chair)
Steven Hernández, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
Doug Edwards, Real Dads Forever
Hon. Michael Ferguson, Judicial Branch Family Support Magistrate Division
Chairman Carleton Giles, Board of Pardons and Parole
Dr. Derrick Gordon, The Consultation Center at Yale University
Gerald Gore, Department of Developmental Services
Anthony (Tony) Judkins, DSS Office of Child Support Services (Domain 5 Committee Co-Chair)
Aileen Keays, UConn Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (Domain 4 Committee Co-Chair)
Nicole Kilduff, Family Strides Inc. (Provider Representative, Executive Level)
Kevin Krusz, Department of Public Health
Lynn Reeves, DSS Office of Child Support Services
Sarju Shah, Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Ariana Trotman, GBAPP (Provider Representative, Program Manager Level)
Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams, Dept. of Children and Families (Domain 3 Committee Chair)
Former Representative Patricia Wilson-Pheanious

Member Regrets:

Senator Marilyn Moore, Co-Chair, CT General Assembly
John Frassinelli, State Department of Education
Anthony Gay, Department of Children and Families (Domain 2 Committee Chair)
Lesley Mara, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
Lucy Potter, Esq., Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Guests in Attendance:

Katie Breslin, Office of Policy Management
Kelley Edwards, DMHAS

Welcome/Introductions

Commissioner Barton Reeves opened the meeting and welcomed all those in attendance, both in person and via Microsoft Teams. She expressed excitement about this collaborative and the opportunity to work with all of the CFI partners. Council Co-chair Senator Moore sent regrets for today's meeting, due to a conflicting legislative committee hearing. Members introduced themselves.

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Meeting Summary * March 27, 2023

Review/Acceptance of December Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Barton Reeves asked members to review minutes from the December 5 meeting for approval. Members reviewed, a motion to accept the minutes was made by the Hon. Michael Ferguson and seconded by Pat Wilson Pheanious. One abstention noted. Minutes accepted by the Council as written.

2023 New England Fathering Conference

Tony Judkins reported the 2023 New England Fathering Conference (NEFC), convened in person for the first time since the pandemic, was held in Newport Rhode Island March 15 -17. Tony, Diana DiTunno and Doug Edwards serve as the Connecticut representatives on the NEFC Planning Committee. The event sold out at 450 registered and the NEFC Planning Committee has been receiving much positive feedback thus far, both during the event itself and since our return to Connecticut. The Committee is currently working on post-event tasks including processing evaluations for review/analysis. He thanked colleagues at Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) for providing support to allow DSS-certified fatherhood program partners who have been working with DMHAS on the Strategic Prevention Framework grant to attend the conference along with several of their respective fatherhood program participants. Tony noted several Council members attended along with Connecticut state agency staff, several researchers, nonprofit agency staff and fatherhood program participants. Connecticut attendees represented 46% of total registrants, with 209 individuals registered.

Tony shared the Committee has been seeking increased engagement by the upper New England states, as there are currently very few representatives on the Committee from Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Therefore, the Committee invited state leaders around New England to join the State Leaders Discussion, a 2-hour meeting specifically for them to discuss their fatherhood efforts and build interstate relationships to support fatherhood work. Each state invited four leaders; Connecticut had additional leaders represented as they were at the event serving as presenters for the State Roundtable session. Commissioner Barton Reeves, Paul Bourdoulous, Deputy Commissioner Mark Polzella, Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams, Joe DiTunno, Lynn Reeves and Chief Family Support Magistrate Michael Ferguson participated in the discussion.

Tony asked Council members who attended the conference to share their thoughts about the event, including the State Leaders Discussion (SLD). Those who participated in the SLD noted it was clear Connecticut's infrastructure and systems change approach to fatherhood work was something other state leaders wanted to know more about, and they were appreciative of the opportunity to share and learn from federal and interstate partners. Members shared they were happy to see there were so many representatives from Connecticut attending, and so many there for the first time. Having different staff participate each year helps to expand the capacity of any agency in this important work, whether at the state or local level. Further, they appreciated the networking opportunities and the ability to re-establish connections to providers, especially noting the Connecticut Roundtable session, which allows front-line staff and managers to gain a larger understanding of what other agencies are doing through a more informal dialogue.

Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI) Council Meeting

Meeting Summary * March 27, 2023

2023 New England Fathering Conference

Members agreed having leaders in attendance is important as well, to confirm for staff they are invested in this work and support efforts for systems change. Members noted the keynote speakers, Dads' Stories feature and workshop sessions were impactful, stated they felt encouraged and inspired and thanked the NEFC Planning Committee, especially the Connecticut representatives, for the work that goes into successfully planning and executing such a large-scale event. Commissioner Bye stated she was glad to be in attendance at this quarterly meeting, as it spurred her to examine father inclusion for the state's Universal Home Visiting initiative that is soon to launch, for which the Office of Early Childhood serves as lead and sister agencies are partnering.

Fatherhood Memorandum of Understanding

Tony stated that the interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is in need of review for any necessary updates. The named MOU liaisons and Council members from each state agency who is a party to the agreement will receive an email regarding this. Once all updates are incorporated into the document, it will be sent by DSS Contracts Unit staff for signature by each party's leadership.

CFI Overview Slides

Diana reported one of the common bullets under the Fatherhood MOU is that all parties agree to "*recognize father engagement efforts within our agency and collaborative efforts with partners are under the umbrella of the CFI and acknowledge the CFI when sharing these efforts with state and federal representatives, the media, community partners and the general public*". Therefore, high-level set of slides have been drafted for Council review/feedback. Once finalized and approved by this Council, all CFI partners under the interagency MOU agree to use the information, including slides and accompanying materials, whenever they are speaking about or presenting on fatherhood efforts with which their agencies are involved. This also includes grant applications and other potential funding opportunities to support the work we do on behalf of Connecticut's fathers and families.

Diana went through the draft set of slides and asked for members' feedback. Diana will update the PowerPoint file as well as supplementary written materials (i.e., CFI Overview) based on members' suggested edits and send out via email for a second review. **Additional feedback should be submitted via email to diana.ditunno@ct.gov by May 5, 2023.**

Strategic Plan: Implementation Update

Domain Committee Chair Reports

DOMAIN 1 (D1): *Fathers economically stable*

Diana reported on behalf of D1 Chair Eddies Cajigas. The group has not met since the last Council meeting but members did attend a webinar hosted by the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse at Mathematica, a partner of the Federal Administration of Children and Families, in lieu of their most recent meeting date of March 21.

Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI) Council Meeting

Meeting Summary * March 27, 2023

Strategic Plan: Implementation Update

Domain Committee Chair Reports, *continued*

DOMAIN 1 (D1): Fathers economically stable, continued

The webinar, entitled “Employment Programs with the Highest Chance of Improving Earnings”, explored a comprehensive resource developed by the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse designed to help service providers understand how likely specific programs will improve employment-related outcomes; what combination of employment-focused services have the greatest chance of improving outcomes and which services are most effective for different groups of people. The Clearinghouse conducted a meta-analysis of the evidence of effectiveness of employment programs they reviewed. Presenters provided a high-level overview of the resource and discussed ways that service providers can use the resource as they explore how to use the evidence to improve the odds that their employment program will be successful. More information can be found at [Digging Deeper into What Works: What Services Improve Labor Market Outcomes, and for Whom? | Pathways to Work \(hhs.gov\)](https://www.hhs.gov/pathways-to-work/what-works/)

DOMAIN 2 (D2): Fathers in healthy relationships with their children, co-parents, significant others

Diana reported on behalf of D2 Chair Anthony Gay. The Committee has had some scheduling challenges so their January meeting was cancelled. They are scheduled to meet next on April 5. They are working on reviewing a DCF Request for Proposal similar to their review of the Parenting Support Program contract scope of services, for ways RFP templates can be more inclusive of fathers in their parenting role. They are also working on the development of a short survey for DCF workers in the adolescent unit regarding post-secondary education opportunities for male youth in the human services/social work field.

DOMAIN 3 (D3): Young people prepared to be responsible parents

Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams shared the D3 Committee has also had challenges with scheduled meeting dates due both weather and the legislative session. Their next step is an initial analysis of the Asset Map by D3 Committee Focus Areas. They have an upcoming meeting scheduled in April.

DOMAIN 4 (D4):

Men involved in the criminal justice system supported in being responsible fathers

Co-Chair Joseph DiTunno reported the group is continuing planning for a “fatherhood within the criminal justice system (CJS)” training event. The CJS has so many different areas, having an event that would be inclusive of the hundreds “boots on the ground” professionals isn’t feasible. Further, the D4 Committee isn’t meant to serve as a group that plans ongoing events and serves more as a consultative role for father-inclusivity and systems change.

Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI) Council Meeting

Meeting Summary * March 27, 2023

Strategic Plan: Implementation Update

Domain Committee Chair Reports, *continued*

DOMAIN 4 (D4):

Men involved in the criminal justice system supported in being responsible fathers, continued

Therefore the group decided to develop an event for CJS leadership and training academy staff from Police/POST, DOC, the Judicial Branch (Court Operations/CSSD), State's Attorney, Public Defender, etc. and then follow up to support how each of the arms of the CJS might incorporate fatherhood principles into their respective staff training, policy and practice. The group is examining potential locations and beginning to identify program content.

DOMAIN 5 (D5): Policy/Public Awareness

Tony Judkins reported there has been great feedback received since the CFI newsletter issue was launched in Summer of 2022. The Spring 2023 issue, focused on fathers and education, was electronically disseminated to the CFI network on March 9, all Council members should have received. He reminded members to please disseminate throughout their respective agencies and partner/contractor networks.

Tony reported that unfortunately the UConn MSW intern introduced at the December meeting, Olivia Czachor, had to end her internship with the CFI due to conflicts with both her school and employment responsibilities.

Fatherhood Program Provider Report: Coalition Updates

Nicole Kilduff provided the report for the provider coalition. She stated the group met twice since the December Council meeting, on January 18 and March 21, and discussed the following:

- CADCA Conference:
 - CT was the only state with Fatherhood representation and realization that the linkage between SUP and Fatherhood could be very impactful
 - Desire to integrate SUP into curriculum or in groups
 - Gathering screening tools FIP sites are using in regard to mental health and Substance Abuse Prevention (SUP) and finding a universal screen that we all could use that will be important for data collecting needed for seeking funding
 - Adding SUP, materials, curriculum, group discussions, etc. into the FIP Contracts (with hopefully additional funding)

- NE Fatherhood Conference:
 - Coalition had all positive things to say about the conference. Was what a lot of sites needed, encouraging us in the work we are doing and continue to want to make a difference in parents and children lives
 - Identified the fact that there were no workshops or speakers that discussed SUP and that CT could be a leader in the fatherhood/SUP work.

**Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI)
Council Meeting**

Meeting Summary * March 27, 2023

Fatherhood Program Provider Report: Coalition Updates, continued

- Training Needs: possibly sponsored or coordinated by DSS; coordination from DSS may allow for better access to specific trainings for FIP staff
 - Domestic Violence/Interpersonal Violence
 - Mental Health First Aide
 - Motivation Interviewing

- Other Matters
 - Some sites have had access to room at the courthouse to meet with referred clients but others have not. Seeking access to a vacant room to utilize to meet with parents that are referred by Child Support Court or Family Court
 - Outreach or awareness to Magistrates regarding Arrearage Adjustment Program to state owed support so the referral to fatherhood services can be instant while at court.
 - Concerns with Fatherhood being flat funded again, costs to run programs continue to increase and it becomes challenging to cover all requirements within the contract with the funds provided.

Other Business

Tony noted DSS and DMHAS are working together to plan a one-day event on Thursday, June 1 and the Mystic Marriott. This CFI Summit will be focused on mental health and recovery. Diana stated a save-the-date would be emailed to the Council, but asked they mark their calendars in the meantime.

Diana shared the meeting schedule for 2023 is currently confirmed as:

- **June 26, 2023**
- **September 25, 2023**
- **December 18, 2023**

Meetings will be scheduled as in-person format (noted in the subject line of the email) with a virtual option to join if available in the meeting room location. Commissioner Barton Reeves' Executive Assistant emailed invites for all meetings. Council members were asked to confirm they received by RSVPing to each invitation. Rooms 1008 & 1011 have been reserved for all, but DSS will be working with LOB to confirm whether any can be held there. Members will be made aware of meeting location as confirmed.

Meeting Adjourned.