

Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI)
Council Meeting
June 27, 2022
Meeting Summary



Members in Attendance:

Commissioner Deidre Gifford, Chair, Department of Social Services (DSS)
Senator Marilyn Moore, Co-Chair, CT General Assembly

Dr. Kari Adamsons, University of Connecticut, Human Development & Family Sciences
Michael Bartley, Department of Labor
Heriberto (Eddie) Cajigas, Department of Labor (Domain 1 Committee Chair)
Daniel Cargill, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Diana DiTunno, DSS Office of Organizational & Skill Development
Joseph DiTunno, Judicial Court Support Services Division (Domain 4 Committee Co-Chair)
Denise Drummond (for Steven Hernández), CWCSEO
Doug Edwards, Real Dads Forever
Kelley Edwards, Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Chairman Carleton Giles, Board of Pardons and Parole
Dr. Derrick Gordon, The Consultation Center at Yale University
Gerald Gore, Department of Developmental Services
Steven Hernández, CWCSEO (Domain 5 Committee Co-Chair)
Anthony (Tony) Judkins, DSS Office of Child Support Services (Domain 5 Committee Co-Chair)
Aileen Keys, UConn Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy
Nicole Kilduff, Family Strides Inc. (Provider Representative, Executive Level)
Alana Kroeber (for Tanya Barrett), United Way of CT
Kevin Krusz, Department of Public Health
Lesley Mara, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
Commissioner Angel Quiros, Department of Correction
Lynn Reeves, DSS Office of Child Support Services
Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Department of Veteran Affairs
Jennifer Wilder (for Commissioner Beth Bye), Office of Early Childhood Deputy Commissioner
Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams, Dept. of Children and Families
Former Representative Patricia Wilson-Pheanious
DeLon Wright, Urban Community Alliance, Inc. (Provider Representative, Direct Service Level)

Member Regrets:

Anthony Gay, Department of Children and Families (Domain 2 Committee Chair)
Lucy Potter, Esq., Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Guests in Attendance:

Katie Breslin, Office of Policy and Management
Deputy Commissioner Sharonda Carlos, DOC
Maria Lopez, DSS Office of Child Support Services
Deputy Commissioner William Mulligan, DOC

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Welcome/Roll Call

Commissioner Gifford opened the meeting. Commissioner Gifford and Senator Moore welcomed and thanked members for their continued partnership. Commissioner Gifford reported that Council member John Dillon, who served as Director of the DSS Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) for many years, retired May 31. John was dedicated leader for the child support program and committed to changing system to better support noncustodial parents who are primarily fathers. She welcomed Lynn Reeves, currently serving as Interim Director of OCSS. Lynn stated she hopes to continue John's efforts and is honored to serve with this group.

Tony noted Carol Meredith, longtime partner and member of the Council for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, has also retired. He welcomed Kelley Edwards, who will serve as the DMHAS representative on the Council until Carol's replacement is hired. Tony also introduced Maria Lopez, Public Assistant Consultant assigned to the CFI team at DSS OCSS. Diana then conducted the roll call.

Review of March Meeting Minutes

Senator Moore asked members to review minutes from the March 28 meeting for approval. Members reviewed, a motion to accept the minutes was made by Pat Wilson Pheanious and seconded by Chairman Carlton Giles. Minutes approved by the full Council as written.

Strategic Plan: Implementation Update

Passage of CFI legislation

Commissioner Gifford stated an email had been sent to this Council announcing the passage of our bill (Senate Bill 289). The link to the bill was provided in that email. She thanked Senator Moore for shepherding the bill through the process and her advocacy informing her legislative colleagues and raise the visibility of the CFI. She thanked members for the work they did to draft this legislation that reflects our collaborative, and for providing testimony and answering questions so that legislatures better understand who we are and what our work together involves.

Tony Judkins shared that he and Steven Hernandez spoke with Representative David Michel, and Tony met with Representative Corey Paris to provide more information about the CFI.

Commissioner Gifford received an invitation from the Governor for event celebrating fathers and families, and Tony and Deputy Commissioner Williams spoke at the recent unveiling of a mural at the DCF Hartford Office location. Tony stated he received several inquiries from the media around Fathers' Day and it's important to keep interest going not just in June but every month!

He plans to share information with the Federal Responsible Fatherhood Roundtable as well. Commissioner Gifford noted, and Senator Moore concurred, now that we have gotten this statewide effort noticed with the passage of our bill planning begins for next legislative session.

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Strategic Plan: Implementation Update, continued

Passage of CFI legislation, *continued*

It is critical to identify funding for both the administration and activities of the CFI and for fatherhood programming/program expansion.

The bill was signed and is now Public Act 22-138. The Act was provided along with these minutes.

Domain Committee Chair Reports

DOMAIN 1 (D1): *Fathers economically stable*

Eddies Cajigas shared well wishes for John Dillon and Carol Meredith and welcomed the new members replacing them, and provided the following update from the D1 Committee:

The most recent meeting was held in April as the scheduled May meeting was cancelled. The next meeting is scheduled for July 12. The group is working on analysis of the fatherhood program providers survey; results and any actions recommended based on the findings will be shared at the September Council meeting. The Committee is still waiting to hear about whether the state's Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) proposals for Career Connect grants were awarded. The information about this opportunity was shared at the March meeting and can be found in the minutes. If successful, we will be able to make direct connections with the respective local WIBs and fatherhood program staff to set up a referral process for the program participants, as they may benefit from participation in such programming and the supports offered through the grant.

Council member Lesley Mara serves on D1 Committee and presented on exciting wraparound services initiatives in support of students - who also may be fathers - that are or will be implemented through CSCU, including the JED Campus and TimelyCare initiatives. She also provided an update on the Community College Consolidation, which includes a single catalog for all campuses so students can view what's being offered; equity across the system for core services; one governing body to develop/revise policy and procedures so that individual campuses do not interpret policy differently and equity in financial aid awards. The state accreditation deadline is the Fall of 2023, so it is expected by then there will be full alignment of credits for degrees, general education requirements, etc. for an associate's degree, students will need to obtain 60 credits; for a bachelor's degree, 120 credits will be required.

At the next meeting DOC Committee representatives will share what their Department is involved in regarding supports for incarcerated fathers as well as fathers under DOC supervision returning to their families/communities.

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Strategic Plan: Implementation Update, continued

Domain Committee Chair Reports, continued

DOMAIN 2 (D2):

Fathers in healthy relationships with their children, co-parents, significant others

Diana provided the report on behalf of Chair Anthony Gay. Diana discussed the draft “how to” guide for state agency contracts as requested at the March Council meeting, which was attached to the Teams invite along with the agenda.

The draft document, entitled “CFI Guide for Agency Contract Scopes_DRAFT 06 02 2022” will be emailed as an attachment along with these minutes.

Council members were asked to review the document, track any changes they recommend along with comments and email to Diana at diana.ditunno@ct.gov by July 26, 2022.

Diana also shared recently the Committee invited Kristine Rivera, adjunct professor at CCSU currently working at Academy of Workforce Development (AWD) at DCF to share information about what’s happening on college campuses regarding human services and social work and what DCF is doing to connect with programs, including UConn BSW program. DCF and higher education is working on recruiting students of color, particularly males. Kristine works to connect her students to DCF and brings colleagues from DCF into her classes to speak with students about a career in child welfare. DCF and UConn BSW program collaborate on student stipends for a Spanish-speaking Child Welfare and Protection track. The purpose is to prepare entry-level social workers to serve a growing number of Spanish-speaking Latinx/a/o families in child welfare and protection. The first two students in the track graduated in the Spring of this year. Stipends students receive are directly connected to DCF employment, working for at least 2 years post-graduation.

Transfers from community colleges have increased number of males in Kristine’s classes; she works to connect Spanish-speaking students to volunteer opportunities for which they gain a competitive spot for a 70-hour paid placement with DCF their second semester of junior year.

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

Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams reported as approved at the March meeting, the target age of focus for this Committee’s work is 14–21 years of age. He noted the Committee continues to work on compiling information for the asset map, which aims to identify gaps in programming/services/resources.

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Strategic Plan: Implementation Update, continued

Domain Committee Chair Reports, continued

D3, continued

The asset map notes supports for young fathers/fathers to be by

- agency
- area of focus, which as approved by the Council are:
 1. Healthy masculinity/healthy relationships/violence prevention
 2. Identification of/services for male youth who may be fathers/expectant fathers
 3. Quality education and support for teen male parenting (includes examination of young parents' program models)
- service/assistance provided
- description – this includes age of target population if applicable, challenges to implementation, etc.
- how service/assistance is funded
- The scope/scale – for instance, is the service only available in certain geographic areas, or is it offered statewide

Representatives who serve on the Committee from the following agencies/institutions are contributing to the asset map, and we are thankful for their input:

Departments of Children and Families, Public Health and Social Services; Office of Early Childhood; Klingberg Family Centers; GBAPP; CT Coalition a\Against Domestic Violence; UConn Department of Human Development and Family Sciences; CT State Colleges and Universities; CT Youth Services Association.

DC Williams asked Diana to share her screen to show the asset map to the Council. **This document will be sent as an attachment to these minutes.**

Council members are asked to review, add information for their agencies as they deem appropriate, and email to Diana at diana.ditunno@ct.gov by August 2.

Once this activity is complete, the group will begin to develop strategies/recommendations/action steps to address the gaps. It is expected that the document will be completed and ready for review by and discussion with the Council at the September meeting

DOMAIN 4 (D4):

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

Co-Chair Aileen Keays reported three interviews with criminal justice system (CJS) stakeholders have been conducted since the March meeting, with DOC Deputy Commissioners Sharonda Carlos and William Mulligan; the head of the Police Chief's Association, Chief Patrick Ridenhour; and Board of Pardons and Parole Chairman, who is also a member of this Council, Carleton Giles.

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Strategic Plan: Implementation Update, continued

Domain Committee Chair Reports, continued

D4, continued

Aileen stated all interviews went very well, leaders were supportive of the D4 Committee’s efforts and agreed to engage in further discussion with staff. They were also receptive to the idea of a statewide, system-wide training for CJS professionals.

She reported DOC believes there are multiple ways DOC can improve, including reinstating formalized fatherhood programming with community providers. The pandemic unfortunately prevented outside providers from entering facilities; however, the DOC is hoping to get programming up and running again soon. Examples of improvements discussed during the interview included:

- increasing the quality of the visiting areas such as creating playgrounds, adding more toys and books to the visiting areas for children to engage with their fathers as well as video visitation
- seeking opportunities that will not result in the incarceration of fathers in certain instances, creating more diversionary programs providing resources, basic needs, funding for wrap around services
- creating programs with art or music, and exploring mirroring York Correctional Institution’s “Mommy and Me” program for the new fathers housed at Manson Youth Institution
- Bringing a formal fatherhood curriculum to each facility and moving away from staff facilitating it independently

Aileen noted Chief Ridenhour, current President Police Chiefs’ Association (PCA), was interviewed. While his term ends in July 2022, he believes the incoming President will also be supportive of the plan to offer training for CJS professionals. The Chief has a whole person viewpoint, officers’ goal is safety and holding individuals accountable. He is also willing to be part of further discussions as a Police Chief, as there is a diverse population in his community which is an asset to this groups’ work. Chief Ridenhour brings insight as to what we are trying to accomplish, with community-based policing efforts in place. He feels it is important to deal with each individual on a case-by-case basis, rather than as a case that brought law enforcement to be engaged with that person.

Chairman Carleton Giles and Richard Sparacko were also interviewed in order to gain the perspective of the Board of Pardons and Parole. Chairman Giles serves as a Council member and is very supportive of the work. While he felt BOPP is on periphery, he is supportive of our plan for training and committed to sending board members to the training.

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Strategic Plan: Implementation Update, continued

Domain Committee Chair Reports, continued

D4, continued

Aileen stated the next group of interviews to be conducted include leaders from Statewide Legal Services, the Division of Public Defender Services and the Office of the Chief State's Attorney. Once those interviews are conducted the Committee can begin some secondary interviews with those staff the leaders asked the group to connect with for more information on strategies and input on the training we are planning.

Aileen stated the draft training plan includes the following topic areas: Implicit bias; its influence in how we perceive and address CJS-involved families; Impact of CJ system involvement on fathers and children, including children's perspectives, information on ACEs and fathers' stories; considering fathers in various stages of the CJ system perhaps via breakout sessions); successful models in US and abroad; what CT has done to support criminal-justice-involved fathers and what else we can do.

Council members agreed the draft plan and topics were relevant and incorporating the information from the stakeholder interviews will be critical as the Committee continues to plan for this statewide training for criminal justice system professionals.

Commissioner Gifford asked if there was a general, statewide standardized training on the importance of father involvement for father-facing employees at state agencies. Tony responded various agencies have provided sessions for their employees; however, there is not one specific curriculum that is delivered. There is a strategy under Domain 5 Committee from the Strategic Plan that speaks to training. Commissioner Gifford will follow up with Tony and Diana regarding the possibility of developing training that state agencies can offer.

DOMAIN 5 (D5): Public Policy and Awareness

Tony reported all Council members should have received the CFI Inaugural Newsletter, as the publication was sent from the CFI email account on June 6. He asked members for confirmation that they forwarded the email/publication to all their staff/colleagues and partner networks and Council members acknowledged they had. He thanked Council members for their continued support as we seek to work on our branding/messaging to raise awareness of and understanding about the CFI.

Tony noted again he was pleased that media outlets have reached out to learn more and articles have been written, which increases our visibility and supports CFI branding.

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Strategic Plan: Implementation Update, continued

Domain Committee Chair Reports, continued

D5, continued

Steve mentioned how the example of Sam and his experience navigating the relationships and interactions with various systems reflects how important it is for agencies to come together and the CFI is an active collaborative that demonstrates such collaboration. He stated the newsletter was shared with all legislators and aides, awareness has increased and it is being seen as more of a priority, so it's important that we keep our visibility high and work toward funding for CFI administration and activities and comprehensive community-based programming for fathers.

Data Development: Results from Jamboard Exercise

Dr. Kari Adamsons and Katie Breslin reported based on the comments received from the Jamboard exercise conducted at the March meeting, the D5 Data Development Subcommittee is planning to shift the data work from the larger CFI group to more focused small-group meetings. To figure out who to put in groups together, they would like to send a short survey to CFI member agencies, asking them to list the top five agencies for which that they collaborate on services or share clients. This will give an opportunity to learn where there is overlap in programming and services. Small-group sessions can then be convened with those groups of agencies that described overlap to brainstorm opportunities to share data – securely, confidentially, ethically. For example, if DOL, DOH, DOC, and SDE list each other as common collaborators in the survey, those agencies can group together to discuss data-sharing opportunities.

Council members agreed this was a good plan. The survey link will be sent to state agency representatives on the Council requesting response and groups will be identified and convened accordingly.

Fatherhood Program Provider Report

Senator Moore stated that fatherhood program provider representation for the Council rotates every two years, and includes someone from executive, program management and direct service levels. She welcomed the three representatives that will serve through December 2023, namely:

- Executive Level: Nicole Kilduff, Executive Director at Family Strides in Torrington
- Program Management Level: Ariana Trotman, GBAPP in Bridgeport
- Direct Service Level: DeLon Wright, Urban Community Alliance

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Fatherhood Program Provider Report, continued

Nicole stated she is excited for the opportunity to represent the provider coalition and looks forward to the work ahead as the providers share successes and trends providers are experiencing across the state as well as potential challenges for which they seek support from this Council.

Other Business

Pat Wilson Pheanious requested contact information for Kelley Edwards, as the focus of the Fall 2022 CFI Newsletter is mental health. Kelley put her information in the meeting chat.

Commissioner Gifford shared that DSS, OEC, DCF and DPH are partnering on a universal home visiting program with funding from the American Rescue Act. This program exists in some other states and the evidence is very compelling in terms of how it improves the welfare of families. Last summer there was an event at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, and a father spoke about the impact the program had on him and his children, which was very moving, and she is excited about how this collaborative effort will be inclusive of fathers as well as mothers.

Next Meeting

Confirmed meeting dates for the rest of 2022 are as follows:

- Monday, September 26, 1:30-3:30pm
- Monday, December 19, 1:30-3:30pm

Teams meeting invites have been sent by Commissioner Gifford's executive assistant.

Advance notice will be provided if/when meetings reconvene in person for members to plan accordingly.

Meeting Adjourned.