

**Governor's Council on Women and Girls:**

**Full Council Meeting**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, July 11, 2023 | 3:00 PM**

**Hybrid: In-Person and Zoom Meeting**

**Video available here:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD13jW8pbhM>

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**I. Greetings and Agency Introductions:**

Lt. Governor called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Vce-chair, Department of Children and Families Commissioner Vanessa Dorante thanks the Lt. Governor and provides remarks about the Council and its work.

The Lt. Governor praises the partners on the Steering Committee, and highlights the legislative successes, such as a range of laws regarding women's reproductive care: allowing pharmacists to prescribe hormonal birth control and emergency contraception, created a new license for free-standing birth centers to provide women more birthing options, and Endometriosis Data and Bio-Repository Program to study early detection and management of endometriosis. There's a new law mandated to provide half a credit for Financial Management and Literacy for high school graduation requirements.

Commissioner Dorantes brings up the presentation given from two young women from Greenwich regarding Financial Management and Literacy back at April's meeting.

The Lt. Governor announced an expansion to an existing law with respect to debt free college eligibility for returning students, and new laws to address child mental health services and social media. She highlighted that \$6.7 million dollars in their budget to expand GPS monitoring for protection of women who have filed for a restraining order against abusive partners.

Roll call was taken.

**II. New Member Presentation: Division of Criminal Justice Programs/Initiatives by Lisa D'Angelo (Executive Assistant State's Attorney Office of Ethics and Professional Standards) and Sharmese Walcott (States Attorney Judicial District of Hartford) (see Attachment 1)**

Lisa D'Angelo begins the presentation:

- D'Angelo begins by explaining what their division is: it's comprised of Chief State Attorney (Patrick Griffin), 3 Deputy Chief State Attorneys (Robert Devlin, Jr., Kevin

- Lawlor, and John Russotto), and 13 State Attorneys. They are committed to the fair and equal administration of justice in Connecticut. They investigate and prosecute criminal matters within its jurisdiction. Two months after Patrick Griffin was appointed Chief State Attorney, he created the Office of Ethics and Professional Standards where D'Angelo transferred into. She acknowledged Chief Griffin's changes as being positive for the Division, and their creation of the first set of Prosecution Standards (will be made available for everyone to view).
- The Lt. Governor asked how many women make up the 13 State Attorneys and Walcott answers four.
  - Walcott explains that the Chief State Attorney and the 3 Deputy Chief State Attorneys handle the overall administrative functions of the Division, and the investigation and prosecution of crime is vested in the 13 State Attorneys. Walcott acknowledges the book of Prosecution Standards and its use of ethics, rules, and codes. She then discusses the Judicial Districts and the courts within them explaining how the processes for State Attorneys to investigate and prosecute works. The state, although divided by the districts, come together collectively.
  - D'Angelo explains they represent the people of Connecticut. She explains that the Office of Ethics and Professional Standards train law enforcement and anyone who believe they need training. She acknowledges Camp Justice for Students (July 23, 2023), which exposes students to the criminal justice system and fields within, through career panels and guest speaker presentations. This for five days from 10am to 3pm. Although they go to locations and speak at schools, police academies, etc., they also have state agencies, people in the community, Office of Victim Services, etc., come in and present to the State Attorneys to help train them to become better prosecutors. She encourages members to reach out if they want to collaborate on training and mentions their training facility. Full Week Detective School for detective in the State of Connecticut was mentioned that they are conducted and expect over 100 attendees; she also mentions a Pilot program she conducted for the Connecticut State Police last November, where 40 were in attendance. She announced a Ten-Week Search and Seizure Course, one night a week in the Fall.
  - Walcott praises D'Angelo for the work she has done and the training she does. She expresses the State Attorneys collaborate in the community and interact with agencies. They are interactive and are interested in exploring different areas. They are involved in non-profits and are continuously finding ways to get involved and be better partners.
  - The Lt. Governor poses a question regarding how the 13 State Attorneys are chosen, and Walcott explains by the Criminal Justice Commission, which is led by the Supreme Court Justice McDonald. On the seven-member Commission, they interview and select the State Attorneys for each district. The Lt. Governor then asks both D'Angelo and Walcott, how they can include more women in the State Attorney's Office. Walcott explains they are doing a good job on bringing more diverse population on their internship level. She explains the Commission brought on more female prosecutors than males, and specifically in Hartford, the first batch of openings was 100% women and the second batch 75% women. She believes it all starts from the internship level and bringing young women in. She acknowledges that within the Division, they have a Women's Council that looks at the issues of gender diversity within the Division.

- D'Angelo adds that the Chief State Attorney's Office and some State Attorneys have Community Engagement Boards and have meetings to discuss ways to collaborate how to make the division better and better assist the community.
- During Q&A:
  - The Lt. Governor acknowledges Violence Prevention Programs and organization's participations and collaborations. She expresses how it is part of the Governor's Gun Safety Initiatives, and notes President Joe Biden's acknowledgement of Connecticut's leadership for Gun Safety and Violence Prevention.
  - Steering Committee member Hartford Health, Daileann Hemmings, posed a question regarding how adding diversity in terms to girls looks like as far as individuals of color. Walcott provided insight on the diversity within the Hartford State Attorney's Office: Inspectors and investigators level are at 50% racial diversity, and the prosecutor level are at 15% racial diversity. D'Angelo acknowledges the law that allows people to go into Law School sooner. They found that many people on their last year of law school are committing to private law firms. She expresses how they are trying to recruit individuals earlier through their fellowship program and have them try to apply to permanent positions sooner.
  - The Lt. Governor expresses that the State Police are at 13% females and need more incoming women and people of color to get into this field.
  - DOH Shante Hanks posed the question of if the fellowships they spoke about are at the career level and expressed the need for ethnic diversity. Walcott expresses how the division has recognized the need for diversity, and how a lot of other organizations are also looking for diverse groups and they are competing with them. She expresses how there is not a ton of upward mobility making retaining talent difficult, they are also looking at not just the State of Connecticut, but the overall East Coast.
  - DOL Commissioner Dante Bartolomeo acknowledges unemployment insurance frauds and expresses that a little push for additional staff can help boost the Divisions efforts and get the work that is needed to be done. She also praises the work that the Division has done in prosecuting those accused of the crime.
  - Jean-Louis asks how early criminal justice should be introduced to young girls and what skills are being looked at. D'Angelo responds to the first question by saying as early as possible to get them involved, and Walcott adds that opening internship options. D'Angelo expressed graduates should have skills in communication and people skills. She announces their Open-House in the Fall for colleges and college students.

### **III. Presentation: Connecticut Paid Leave Authority Annual Report Summary by Erin Choquette (Chief Executive Officer of CT Paid Leave) (*see Attachment 2*)**

Erin Choquette begins presentation:

- Quick overview of what the CT Paid Leave Act is, which is the Connecticut law that provides income replacement benefits to workers who need paid time off. The benefits

- that they provide are funded by 0.5% of wages by Connecticut workers, which is received through nearly 145,000 employers registered with the CT Paid Leave Authority, including 3364 sole proprietors. Since inception, they have provided over \$375 million in paid leave benefits to 65,935 workers.
- The Annual Report has many required elements and help share the work that they do. The report highlights include receiving 90,393 total applicants for benefits (70% were approved, 30% were denied mainly because of failure to provide required documents). They are working on making sure individuals know these benefits are provided to them. During the reporting period, 55,111 workers received \$293,534,054 in approved benefits payments (55% from injury, 23% pregnancy or childbirth recovery, 11% child connection, 11% family members, and less than 1% are other). She expressed that the Trust fund continues to be fiscally sound and have received \$436,835,677 in contributions (fund balance of \$531,057,327).
  - She acknowledges their continuous outreach and education contributions including a total of 58 webinars and participation in several virtual and in-person speaking events during the reporting period. She also acknowledges over 142,000 subscribers on their email database and have a podcast with their recent episode on family violence. Their social media presence continues to grow.
  - She moves on to discuss their improvements. She expresses their claims process has enhanced and they have been working on responding to claims faster. A Document Dashboard was presented which allows claimants to see a list of the documents they need to submit for their claim to be considered complete and ready for a decision and where the document is in the review process.
    - Commissioner Dorantes asked a question regarding language barriers and if the Document Dashboard provides different languages for our diverse state. Choquette expresses they provide everything in English and Spanish and are continuing to work on providing easier comprehension for all populations.
    - The Lt. Governor asked if any fraud was seen. Choquette affirms the question and announces they have a meeting with the DOL to address the issue.
  - She emphasizes how happy they are processing claims and getting people the help they need as quickly as possible. She includes that fund recovery is another aspect that they are working on. She recognizes that the Authority launched a multi-disciplinary, multi-phase project to identify and recover past-due contributions from employers. She also recognizes that they have implemented a software solution that helps track all contributions, issues notices of contributions that are passed due and allocates payments accordingly to penalty, interest, and conditions.
  - She acknowledges that they are working on a website redesign and re-platform to include more detailed information for all audiences and include more in-depth information related to claims process. They offer paid leave benefits through their private plan, which has received 708 approved private plans (151 were approved during the reporting period) and the Authority has developed comprehensive audit policies and procedures. In April 2023, they began conducting audits of private plans.
  - The Lt. Governor acknowledges a question asking if there are staff that can help assist in literacy issues. Choquette answers by saying there are a capable of options available, including online, calling the call center (through Aflac) for any questions, their partnership with an entity that has bilingual staff, and working with community

- organizations to make sure individuals who work with people can provide a bridge of information to provide information
- The Lt. Governor thanks Choquette for her presentation on the report.

#### **IV. Report from Council Leadership/Subcommittee Reports/Announcements**

The Lt. Governor acknowledges she has an intern through LiveGirl's SHEWORKS program, who is working on producing annual report summaries (from 2019 to 2022). These reports will serve as a guide to new members to stay up to date on the work the Council has been doing and the work they still must do. An update on the availability of the reports will be provided at the October Full Council Meeting.

The Lt. Governor provides an overview on what the Governor's Council on Women and Girls does and the Subcommittees work. She reminds the members that the meeting minutes are available on the CoWaG website and welcomes any members to speak and provide updates on Subcommittees.

Jean-Louis announces that Health and Safety had a big legislative update, and their meeting minutes are online. She also updated the Economic Opp. & Workforce Equity's work on women returning into the workforce. She provided an update on Education and STEAM and the Computing Challenge initiatives to provide tools for districts to use for computer science and coding.

The Lt. Governor praises the stars in the Lt. Governor's Computing Challenge and acknowledged Infosys for hosting them. She then proceeds to provides dates for Subcommittee Meetings:

- Economic Opportunity & Workforce Equity Subcommittee – August 15<sup>th</sup> @ 3pm
- Education & STEAM Subcommittee – August 23<sup>rd</sup> @ 3pm
- Health & Safety Subcommittee – September 5<sup>th</sup> @10am
- Leadership Subcommittee – September 20<sup>th</sup> @3pm
- Full Council Meeting – October 17<sup>th</sup> @ 3pm

The Lt. Governor thanks the members in attendance and Commissioner Dorantes closes out by praising the networking opportunities of the Council.

#### **V. Adjournment**

Meeting Adjourned at 4:00pm