



NEW JERSEY TASK FORCE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT 12TH ANNUAL REPORT



PROCEEDINGS AND FINDINGS FOR THE PERIOD OF
JULY 1, 2021 — JUNE 30, 2022

CO-CHAIRS, NEW JERSEY TASK FORCE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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New Jersey Department of Children and Families

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Vice President
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NEW JERSEY TASK FORCE ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT MEMBERS

NOTE: ALL MEMBERS LISTED, STATUS OF MEMBERSHIPS, JOB TITLES, AND ORGANIZATION AFFILIATIONS AREAS OF JUNE 30, 2022

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Designee: Jennifer Underwood

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Honorable Margaret M. Foti, P.J.Cr.
Bergen County Superior Court
Criminal Division

Honorable Charles W. Dortch, Jr., J.S.C
New Jersey Superior Court Judge
Camden County Hall of Justice
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Designee: Jacqueline Augustine

Honorable Colonel Patrick J. Callahan
Superintendent
New Jersey State Police
Designee: Lt. Stephen Urbanski

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Acting Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education
Designee: Sonia Moticha

Honorable Matthew J. Platkin
Acting Attorney General
New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety
Designee: Christian Arnold

Honorable Joseph Krakora
Public Defender
New Jersey Office of the Public Defender
Designee: Seetha Holmes

Honorable Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq.
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Corrections
Designee: Wendi White

Honorable Judith M. Persichilli, R.N., B.S.N., M.A.
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New Jersey Department of Health
Designee: Marilyn Gorney-Daley

County Prosecutor
Pending

Honorable Sarah Adelman
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Human Services
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Honorable William Sampson
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Director

Mercer County Department of Human Services

Richard Stagliano

President and CEO

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Nydia Monagas

Executive Director

New Jersey Children's Alliance

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Warren County Commissioner

Tracy Kaplan

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Christina Lazzaruolo

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Lorene Wilkerson, Chair

Child Placement Advisory Council

STAFF

Daniel Yale

Executive Coordinator



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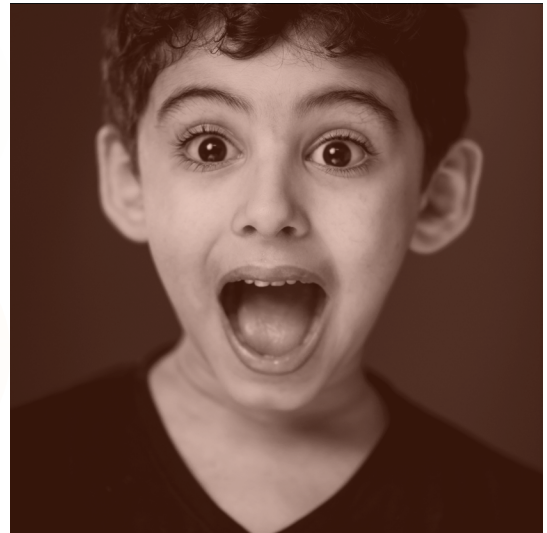
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INTRODUCTION

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN) is a statutorily established, multidisciplinary citizen review panel to support New Jersey's child welfare system. The NJTFCAN also serves as New Jersey's Children's Justice Act (CJA)-designated entity, authorizing it to receive and administer CJA funds.

The purpose of the NJTFCAN, in accordance with the statute, is to study and develop recommendations regarding the most effective means of improving the quality and scope of child protective and preventative services provided or supported by State government. This includes a review of the practices and policies used by the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) and the Division of Family and Community Partnerships (FCP), both within the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in order to:

- optimize coordination of child abuse-related services and investigations;
- promote the safety of children at risk of abuse or neglect;
- ensure a timely determination with regard to reports of alleged child abuse;
- educate the public about the problems of, and coordinate activities relating to, child abuse and neglect;
- develop a statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect and mechanisms to facilitate child maltreatment prevention strategies in coordination with the FCP;
- mobilize citizens and community agencies in a proactive effort to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect;
- foster cooperative working relationships between state and local agencies responsible for providing services to survivors of child abuse and neglect and their families; and
- serve as one of DCF's federally mandated Citizen Review Panels.





CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT ACT

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides CJA grants that are used to develop programs to reform state systems and improve New Jersey's response to cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and suspected cases of child abuse and neglect fatalities.

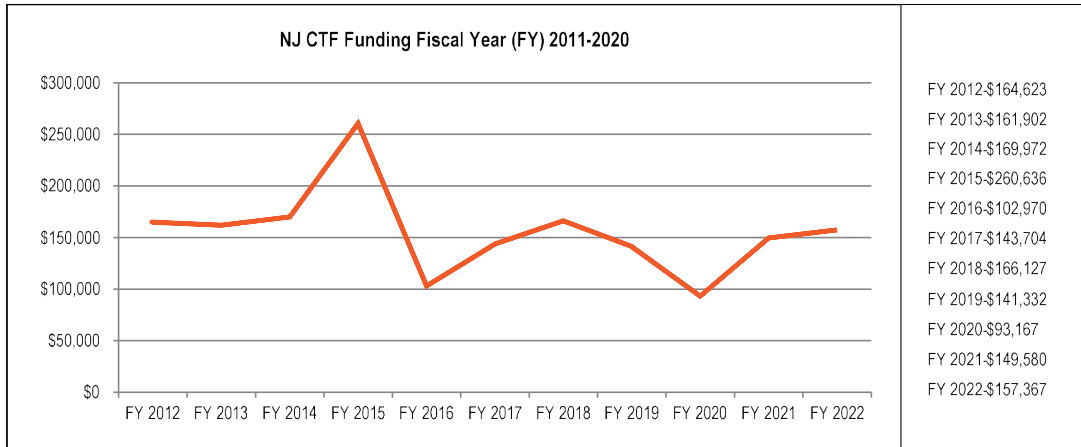
CJA funds are also used to establish and support programs to improve New Jersey's child protection system in a manner that limits additional trauma to child victims of abuse and neglect. In accordance with the NJTFCAN's Three-Year Assessment for 2022 to 2025, model programs and innovative approaches were implemented to improve the identification, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect, as well as enhance the effectiveness of the judicial process.

NEW JERSEY CHILDREN'S TRUST

The New Jersey Children's Trust Fund (NJ CTF) is a private/public partnership created by law in 1985 to fund child abuse and neglect prevention programs in New Jersey communities. NJ CTF receives funds primarily from donations made by residents via a check box on New Jersey income tax forms. Private donors can also make contributions into the fund. Any portion of the CTF funds which are not appropriated to support child abuse and prevention programs is carried forward into the next fiscal year.

These re-appropriated funds, along with the actual collections for the fiscal year through the income tax check-off and private donations, comprise the total funding available in any fiscal year to support child maltreatment prevention efforts.

The NJ CTF supports local child abuse and neglect prevention programs that implement evidence-based and evidence-informed programs. Below are NJ CTF's collections from 2012 - 2022:





NJTFCAN PROCEEDINGS

Quarterly meetings provide NJTFCAN with the opportunity to discuss and assess items associated with its statutorily mandated work. Three subcommittees support NJTFCAN's work: Protection, Prevention and the Staffing and Oversight and Review Subcommittee (SORS). These subcommittees meet on a regular basis and report the results of their activities to NJTFCAN. There are approximately 80 individuals that contribute to this important work. To view a copy of meeting minutes, visit <http://nj.gov/dcf/providers/boards/njtfcan/>.



SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

The NJTFCAN held 3 meetings between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022. Throughout the reporting period, the NJTFCAN was provided with regular updates regarding DCF initiatives. In September 2021, the Task Force learned of DCP's continuing efforts to identify additional supports and services for kinship families to be able to support children that are placed with kin or fictive kin. Needs of kinship families are typically unique from those of traditional foster families, so DCF will continue to build supports for kinship families in need. Commissioner Beyer highlighted the Youth Council within the DCF Office of Family Voice. The Youth Council consists of 20 young people between the ages of 16 and 23 who have been meeting regularly to discuss and work on the following projects:

- A Peer-to-Peer mentoring program (enlightenMENT)
- Revisions to the NJ Youth Resource Website (NJYRS)
- Development of a youth resource mobile app

- Development and advocacy of a statutory Sibling Bill of Rights
- Improvements to the DCF foster parent training

Commissioner Beyer also provided updates regarding the implementation of Universal Newborn Home Visiting in New Jersey. An advisory committee, consisting of 25 individuals with expertise in this area, was convened in September 2021 to discuss planning and implementation of Universal Home Visiting. DCF also had discussions on focus groups and a public awareness campaign. Commissioner Beyer discussed including many partners and stakeholders in the process as this is not something that DCF can accomplish on its own.

In December 2021, Commissioner Beyer provided an update regarding DCF's strategic plan, particularly race equity and family voice. During "phase 3" of the Department's roll-out of race equity work, DCF used previous race equity trainings to implement changes

“on the ground.” Additionally, Commissioner Beyer discussed the reduction in children in foster care and the increase in children placed with kin. During this meeting, NJTFCAN members were also provided updates on the use of American Rescue Plan funds, the status of DCF’s work to satisfy the federal Sustainability and Exit Plan, and the Powerful Families, Powerful Communities NJ initiative to transform New Jersey’s child welfare system. Patty Mojta, co-chair of the NJTFCAN Prevention Committee, provided a presentation regarding the 2022-2025 NJ Statewide Prevention Plan which was approved by the members. Mary Coogan challenged Task Force members to read the plan in detail and determine ways in which their respective departments and organizations can contribute to the plan and increase collaboration.

In March 2022, the Task Force was provided another status update regarding the DCF’s efforts to satisfy the federal Sustainability and Exit Plan. In February 2022, DCF was able to negotiate an exit plan agreement with Judge Stanley Chesler, the federal monitor, Judith Meltzer and Plaintiff’s Attorney Marcia Lowry in the Charlie and Nadine H. v. Murphy class-action lawsuit. Under the terms of this agreement, DCF will implement a new Continuous Quality Improvement system to include a family survey portion and will draft legislation to increase transparency and accountability of DCF’s performance and staffing data. The agreement reached between the parties identified the NJTFCAN Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS) to become the body that would continue to examine the Department’s performance. Also, during this meeting, the NJTFCAN was provided a presentation on Powerful Families, Powerful Communities NJ by the program’s executive director, Benita Miller.

Each year, NJTFCAN sponsors multidisciplinary training programs to improve the handling of cases of child abuse and neglect. All NJTFCAN-sponsored professional training programs are child-focused and designed to promote skills that prevent additional trauma to children and their families.

CJA funds were used to support the following professional development projects to enhance the knowledge of persons involved in the investigation, prosecution, assessment, and treatment of child abuse and neglect:

Finding Words – New Jersey: Forensic Interviewing & Preparing Children for Court

This project trains frontline professionals involved in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse to conduct effective and legally defensible interviews of alleged child sexual abuse victims of various ages and to prepare children for court. The child-focused forensic interviewing project continues to reform the investigation and prosecution process and improve civil and criminal court proceedings

To date, over 2,000 professionals involved in investigating child sexual abuse have been trained in Finding Words-NJ

2021 Online Biennial Conference Finding System Resilience Thru Covid-19

NJTFCAN, in collaboration with DCF and Stockton University Child Welfare Education Institute, hosted an online biennial skill-building webinar series, “Finding System Resilience Thru Covid-19.”

This webinar series consisted of two separate, two-hour online sessions, beginning Tuesday, October 19th, with thought-leaders on the topic of mental health, trauma, grief and loss, and self-care, and how each intersects with the impact of COVID-19, and the work that we do at DCF as part of New Jersey’s child and family welfare and well-being system. Each 2-hour session offered 2.0 Clinical or Cultural Competency Contact Hours of Continuing Education (CE) for Social Workers, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, and Licensed Professional Counselors.

The first conversation, held on October 19, 2021, featured Drs. Janet Cahill and Allen Lipscomb on the topic of mental health and trauma. Dr. Cahill discussed the challenges that individuals connected to the child welfare system continued to face during this time, how stress and anxiety related to COVID-19 can affect the mental health of these individuals in particular, and how trauma can affect the personal and professional lives of people working in the child welfare system. While COVID-19 has taken a toll on the child welfare system workforce, the negative effects of the pandemic have also been felt by the children, families, and communities they serve. Dr. Lipscomb discussed how the pandemic has affected minority communities and how the trauma caused by COVID-19 can be addressed.

The second conversation, held on October 28, 2021, featured Jennifer Vazquez, LCSW, and Dr. Mary Pulido on the topics of grief and loss and employee wellness. After 18 months of living with COVID-19, many people have developed what has been called "COVID fatigue." Jennifer Vazquez, LCSW, discussed how to cope with COVID fatigue, grief and loss, and offered strategies to assist with the burdens of COVID in the future. As discussed during the previous session, COVID-19 has and will continue to negatively affect the mental and physical health of New Jersey's child welfare system workforce. Dr. Pulido discussed ways to counteract these effects and reduce trauma by promoting methods of increasing wellness for those in the field of child welfare.

Through these two virtual events, participants:

- Learned about the challenges individuals connected to the child welfare system faced and continue to face, how stress and anxiety related to COVID-19 can affect mental health, and how trauma can affect the personal and professional lives of people working in child welfare during and after the COVID-19 public health crisis;
- Gained a deeper understanding of the emotional consequences and trauma associated with COVID-19 and felt by children, families, and, in particular, minority communities in New Jersey;
- Learned about the implications of COVID fatigue, coping with grief and loss, and other strategies to assist with the after-effects of COVID in the future;
- Discovered ways to counteract the lasting negative effects of COVID-19 and reduce trauma by promoting methods for increased wellness in the workforce.

*NJTFCAN 2021 Online Biennial
Skill Building Webinar Series
October 19, 2020
October 28, 2020*

Finding Resilience Thru Covid-19



NJTFCAN RECOMMENDATIONS TO DCF

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect recommends:

1. DCF continues its work in understanding and addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Research on the subject of ACEs has shown that individuals who experience high levels of adversity early in life are more likely to see a lasting impact from that adversity, including long-term health issues, substance abuse issues, mental health challenges, financial instability, homelessness, and more. The lasting impact from ACEs can erode protective factors in an individual's adult relationships, thus perpetuating the cyclical nature of adversity and maltreatment.
2. DCF continues its efforts to implement a healing-centered lens over the work that they do and utilizing evidence-based practices where available. Recognizing and addressing the root cause of trauma rather than simply remedying the outward projections of trauma are more effective in creating a stable environment in which to facilitate healing and well-being. Ultimately, by shifting DCF's work to a healing-centered approach, New Jersey can minimize the impact from trauma on its population and improve outcomes for families throughout the Garden State.
3. DCF continues to promote and encourage the development of protective factors given that research demonstrates that enhancing protective factors (parental resilience, concrete support in times of need, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children) buffers the negative impact of trauma and toxic stress, and allows families to navigate stressful times while maintaining the nurturing potential of the family unit.
4. DCF continue its work with diversity, equity, and inclusion in training, policy and practice, and implementation. The NJTFCAN also recommends that DCF continue to partner with those with lived experience to inform or reform policy and practice.

5. DCF continue its commitment to ensuring that children and families affected by child-on child sexualabuseandactivityhaveaccesstoappropriate services to include the ongoing support of the DCF State Central Registry, establishment of a child treatment fund, training of mental health providers, training of stakeholders, support of case manager positions, and data collection and analysis.



WORK OF THE NJTFCAN COMMITTEES

PREVENTION COMMITTEE

The Prevention Committee, with expertise in, and a commitment to, family support and the prevention of all forms of child maltreatment, coordinates the efforts of stakeholders. This committee promotes the development of legislation, policies, programs/initiatives and services that strengthen family and child well-being with the ultimate goal of preventing child maltreatment in New Jersey.

It is the Prevention Committee's responsibility to ensure the development and implementation of a meaningful and effective Statewide Prevention Plan.

The Committee held 3 full-committee meetings and several additional ad hoc workgroup meetings between July 2021 and June 2022. All meetings were held virtually.

During the past year, the Prevention Committee finalized the 2022-2025 NJ Statewide Prevention

Plan. The plan, which was approved by the Task Force, included 6 priority areas:

1. Promote racial equity/racial justice and reduce disparities across populations in service access, service provision, and retention.
2. Increase opportunities for effective youth and family participation and partnership in policy and program planning, implementation, continuous quality improvement (CQI), evaluation, and outcomes.
3. Promote developmentally based trauma-informed and healing-centered prevention practices.
4. Partner and collaborate with key stakeholders across systems to ensure access to a full continuum of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention services for universal, select, and indicated populations with an emphasis on non-stigmatizing strategies within a risk and protective factors framework.
5. Enhance data infrastructure and appropriate data sharing for decision-making.

6. Ensure a highly qualified workforce with ties to the local community to provide inclusive, culturally, and linguistically sensitive evidence-based prevention services.

Other accomplishments of this year include the development of a Prevention Committee Charter and supporting an expanded roll-out of the WE CAN campaign on DCF's social media platforms during the month of April.

NEXT STEPS:

In the next fiscal year, the Prevention Committee will take steps to operationalize the Prevention Plan. These steps include the creation of an agenda to track the progress, accomplishments and challenges of the strategic plan. The Prevention Committee will also work towards increasing membership with a focus on recruiting members to represent the diversity of NJ's population and all aspects of the prevention community.

PROTECTION COMMITTEE:

The Protection Committee is comprised of members of NJTFCAN and allied members in the child maltreatment field. The members analyze state laws, policy, and case practice, within and outside New Jersey. The goal of the committee is to coordinate the efforts of stakeholders as well as advance new methods to address child maltreatment. During the previous year, the main areas of focus included Internet safety and work with juveniles with inappropriate sexual behaviors. The following represents the work of the Protection Committee and its workgroups:

WORKGROUPS

Digital Realm of Child Abuse Workgroup

The Digital Realm of Child Abuse workgroup continued to concentrate their efforts on the topic of online safety, this year focusing on the development of materials for parents and caregivers in partnership with the NJ Department of Education (NJDOE). These materials included an online safety flyer to

promote ease of distribution to parents and caregivers as well as an accompanying guide that included more comprehensive and detailed information and resources. The goal of these materials was to equip parents and caregivers with tips for having open discussions with their children about online safety and keeping them safe online, and how to get help or report suspicious activity online. These materials were released during June for National Internet Safety Month and were sent to all school districts as a resource to share and utilize within their parent communities. These resources have also been shared and distributed through the NJTFCAN and NJ Department of Children and Families' networks and are posted on the NJDOE website for future access.

Children with Problematic Sexual Behaviors Workgroup

The Children with Problematic Sexual Behaviors (PSB) Workgroup was created to discuss and improve the child welfare and juvenile justice system's responses to cases involving children with problematic sexual behaviors. The workgroup continues to address this issue in the following four areas: tracking of child-on-child sexual abuse (COCSA) cases, training, exploring policy and legislative efforts and the Division of Child Protection and Permanency's (DCPP) response to COC cases.

The State Central Registry (SCR) and the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) continue to track COCSA cases. Data for calendar year 2021-22 will be shared in the Fall 2022. This group hopes to review the data to better understand the case factors associated with an intake to make recommendations to enhance the state's response to cases and improve access to resources.

With respect to training, this workgroup continues to promote training throughout the state for a variety of audiences, including child protective services and medical and mental health professionals. This workgroup is exploring training options for

professionals working within the Children’s Systems of Care (CSOC), to include staff of care management organizations (CMOs) and Mobile Response and Stabilization Services units. The workgroup is also developing an educational one-pager about COCSA for legislators and policymakers to assist in funding decisions. In addition, this group continues to monitor the efforts of other states which pursue amending/creating legislation to establish an appropriate response to COCSA cases.

There is a statewide effort to create a coordinated, comprehensive statewide response to COCSA cases that enables child victims and child initiators/actors and their families to access specialized medical and mental health services. The Statewide COCSA Response Workgroup consists of representatives from government, private and public state and local agencies and includes representatives from the Children with Problematic Sexual Behavior (PSB) Workgroup. The Statewide COCSA Response Workgroup collected data via surveys spanning current local and state responses to COCSA cases, the resources available to address medical and mental health needs, and caregiver experiences accessing services. The Children with PSB Workgroup will utilize the data to inform recommendations to improve local and statewide responses to COCSA cases and to identify future initiatives.

MARKETING AND FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

During this reporting period, the NJTFCAN approved the creation of a new subcommittee that would work to raise the profile of the Children’s Trust Fund (CTF). This new subcommittee will seek to recruit members that have backgrounds in corporate fundraising and marketing strategies and is now in the process of being developed.

STAFFING AND OVERSIGHT REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE (SORS)

The charge of the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS) is outlined in the NJTFCAN statute and includes the following:

- Reviewing staffing levels of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP);
- Developing recommendations regarding staffing levels;
- Developing recommendations around the most effective methods of recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff within the DCPP;
- Reviewing the DCPP performance in the achievement of management and client outcomes; and
- Reporting annually the Subcommittee’s findings to the Governor and Legislature.

SORS attended to this charge by creating a strategic workplan outlining eight focus area goals to inform the SORS practice to assist DCF in the achievement of the department’s priorities.

SORS convened its body during the past year for a total of five times. In the meetings, the focus was on several areas agreed upon in the previous work plan. These areas included discussions regarding:

- Impact of COVID-19 on the DCPP Work and the Workforce
- DCF Sustainability and Exit Plan
- Solution Based Casework (SBC) Practice Model
- Race Equity and Inclusion
- Increasing Kinship Placements for Children of Color
- DCF Office of Staff Health and Wellness
- Children’s System of Care Integration
- DCF Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)

2022 – 2023 Priorities of the SORS*

The SORS identified the following priorities for the upcoming year as it relates to the CFSP and are in alignment with the vision of the DCF Administration and will encompass facets of the shift in the focus to prevention.

- Request information from DCF regarding recruiting staff, workforce development, and hiring.
- Request information/data from DCPD regarding re-entry into out-of-home placement.
- Request an update from DCF regarding Family First Prevention Services and any outcome data.
- Request a presentation from the DCF Office of Staff Health and Wellness (Safety Survey, Staff Response).
- Request a report from DCF regarding the Four Branch Meetings regarding takeaways/ recommendations/next steps.
- Request an update from DCPD regarding the impact of Solution-Based Casework.
- Request information from DCF pertaining to the impact of Telework Pilot on DCF staff.
- Monitor the ongoing immersion and implementation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices across the various divisions – CSOC, DCPD, OTPD, etc., primarily coordinated by the Office of Diversity, Equity and Belonging.
- Request information on DCF’s ongoing efforts related to bias, anti-racism and anti-poverty training.
- For the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee Annual Report, please visit: https://nj.gov/dcf/news/reportsnewsletters/taskforce/njtfca_reports.html

TASK FORCE COMMITTEES/SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

Note: All members listed, status of membership, job titles, and organization affiliations are as of June 30, 2022.

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Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

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Mariam Gerges, LCSW

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Bergen Family Center

Wendi White, MA, R-DMT

Vocation Program Specialist

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Department of Corrections

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Liza Kirschenbaum, Vice-Chair

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Lisa Landsman

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Scout Hartley, MPA

*Staff Consultant
National Foster Youth Institute*

*resigned from the Committee in 2020-21

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Angie Waters

CASA Atlantic/Cape May

Robyn Veasey, Esq

*Deputy Public Defender
Office of the Public Defender*

Honorable Joseph Vitale

*Senator, District 19
Designee: Stephanie Albanese*

STAFF

Daniel Yale

*Executive Coordinator
New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect
Department of Children and Families*