



Christine Norbut Beyer, MSW, Co-Chair  
Martin A. Finkel, DO, FACOP, FAAP, Co-Chair

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## Minutes

**June 26, 2020**  
Virtual Meeting

### **In Attendance**

Christine Beyer	NJ Department of Children and Families
Marygrace Billek	Mercer County Human Services
Mary Coogan	Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Cindy Cortez	Office of Senator Shirley Turner
Esther East	Jewish Family Services
Martin A. Finkel	CARES Institute
Kathy Haggerty	Administrative Office of the Courts
Natasha Johnson	NJ Department of Human Services
Corinne LeBaron	embrella
Sonia Moticha	Department of Education
Kaitlin Mulcahy	Montclair State University
Assw. Nancy Muñoz	Legislative District 21
Richard Stagliano	Center for Family Services
Jennifer Underwood	Department of Community Affairs

### **Guests:**

Patty Mojta	PCA NJ
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### **Staff**

Daniel Yale	NJ Department of Children and Families
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“In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of notice filed with the Secretary of State, the Trenton Times and the Newark Star Ledger and posted at the Department of State, 125 West State St., 1st Floor, Trenton, New Jersey.”

### **Introduction and Welcome**

A brief welcome was provided by Dr. Finkel and the public notice information was provided.

### **NJTFCAN Business**

#### **Review and approve minutes from the meeting on March 27, 2020.**

The minutes from the March 27, 2020 were not approved at this time as there was not a quorum.

### **Updates from Commissioner Beyer**



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Commissioner Beyer informed the Task Force that DCF is looking at structural changes as a result of looking at what the department wants and needs to focus on. Commissioner Beyer stated that the strategic plan still drives the decisions that are being made and that the vision, values, core approaches to the work, and the goals that were set still stand. DCF will continue to place children with kin and continue to reduce the number of children in foster care. DCF has seen a 20% decrease in foster care placements from 2018. This is in addition to over 60% decrease since 2003. DCF will be orienting some of our work around how to support kinship families to ensure children can stay with family when possible. Prevention continues to be preventing maltreatment, both on the domestic violence side as well as the DCPD side.

Due to budget concerns related to COVID-19, DCF is looking at how to shift funds to provide more prevention services and upfront services. Regarding the Children's System of Care (CSOC), DCF was set to receive an additional \$90 million in order to raise the rates for at home providers, but those funds are no longer available. DCF is continuing their effort to ensure that they have additional funds to raise rates. Commissioner Beyer informed the Task Force that there was a mental health crisis before, but there is concern that it will be worse because of the enhanced need within the CSOC in terms of supports and services that children and families need. If these rates are not increased, DCF will continue to lose providers for group home space. This is the most critical element and DCF will continue to push to increase rates

The Department is also doing race equity work, taking an anti-racism approach to the work that is being done. As a department, DCF has made very strong statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. DCF executive management recently received and is reviewing recommendation received through the DCF Race Equity Steering Committee and Dr. Carol Spigner. These recommendations include making changes to the services we provide and how those services are provided to end disproportionality and disparity in our services and the impact on DCF staff.

Regarding DCF's ACEs work, Commissioner Beyer has been meeting monthly with the Ace Funder's Collaborative, which includes the Burke Foundation, the Nicholson Foundation, and the Terrell Fund. They have agreed to fund an executive on loan for the state to focus on raising awareness of ACEs and resiliency. The executive on loan, Dave Ellis, has extensive experience and is a national expert on ACEs, trauma informed care, and brain science. He has been working with Dr. Rob Anda and Laura Porter for the last 5 years, training master trainers on ACEs. Mr. Ellis will be the Executive Director of the Office of Resilience within DCF. Although he will be a DCF employee, he will work across departments to have a more interdepartmental approach at a leadership level about how we can impact state government and bring that to the community. Commissioner Beyer stated that she felt very fortunate to have him with us at this time to be able to think through the impact and trauma of COVID-19 on children. Commissioner Beyer informed the Task Force that DCF staff will be working remotely for the next several months. However, one local office will be reopened in each county on a limited basis and staff will be returning to field work beginning on July 6<sup>th</sup>. This includes face to face visits, seeing families in person, and supervised visitation. Visitation can occur in local offices if necessary and there will be onsite cleaning all day. Child health unit nurses and CADCs will be available in the local offices on a rotating basis. However, much of their work will be done remotely rather than working together in large office spaces. DCF is purchasing thermal screeners so that anyone coming into an office will have their temperature screened prior to entering. There will also be PPE kits available for staff. As PPE continues to be in short supply, there have been conversations with some of the department's public health trained staff regarding the various tasks that staff will do with families and the appropriate level of PPE needed for those tasks. DCF has partnered with the Department of Health to obtain access to addresses of people who



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test positive for COVID. Prior to staff responding to homes, we are able to determine if a higher level of precaution is necessary.

Commissioner Beyer also informed the Task Force that the Governor and the CWA union have reached a deal to require state worker furloughs. These furloughs will occur in a condensed period of time between June 29<sup>th</sup> and ending July 25<sup>th</sup>. DCF has the most CWA workers of any department in the state, employing 5,800 CWA workers. So DCF will be functioning at 50% staffing in order to ensure furloughs are taken. The decision on who will be furloughed will be based on operational needs. DCF has core functions that cannot be sacrificed which will make the determination of who is furloughed more challenging.

Commissioner Beyer explained that there are a lot of good things going on in the department. ACEs work, race equity, staff health and wellness, and collaborative safety. The teams within the local offices are doing fun things to stay connected and keep up morale.

Richard Stagliano asked if the hybrid of virtual and home visiting will continue beyond July/August.

Commissioner Beyer explained that it is important for DCPD staff to see people in person. DCPD may continue to keep some of the virtual connection as some families have said it is positive for them and we have more families participating in counseling sessions because they don't have the barrier of transportation issues. DCF is not looking to take away the things that work and are beneficial. But for DCPD staff, there are requirements for face to face visits when it comes to abuse/neglect. It is important for DCPD staff to be able to speak with children without their parents in the room so that they feel more comfortable. That cannot occur during a virtual visit. Dr. Finkel stated that his staff mailed earbuds to all of children that were participating in therapy so that they have some sense of privacy between themselves and the therapist.

Dr. Finkel stated that telehealth has been very successful and has very good outcome data. There are less no-shows and greater adaptability. There has been a lot that has been achieved in medical and therapy in adapting to this new technology.

Regarding telehealth, Nancy Muñoz informed the Task Force that a bill passed through the Health Committee regarding parity for telehealth payments for continuation which is particularly important in the mental health field. Marygrace stated the NJAMHA has been advocating for a six-month continued waiver for telehealth through Medicaid. Providers have a 85% show rate through telehealth when historically it was a struggle to have a 65% show rate.

Natasha spoke about childcare through COVID-19. DHS and DCF worked jointly to provide critical childcare for families whose parents were frontline workers. Natasha stated that DCF did an excellent job of pulling together the new health and safety standards. This was and continues to be a huge accomplishment. The childcare community will need tremendous support as the economy begins to reopen and depending on whether schools reopen in the fall, it may be even more important. Natasha stated that they received funds from the federal government for the childcare block grant so providers have the ability to apply for funds for PPEs or other items to meet the health and safety standards or other immediate needs. Nancy Muñoz stated that the Committee for Women and Children had extensive hearings regarding childcare and the daunting obstacles that they face which includes reassuring parents that it is safe to bring their children back. They are looking at ways to provide PPEs and other supplies.

Commissioner Beyer stated that, although we look different as a state, DCF looks entirely different as a department. When we look at DCF data from three months ago and data from today, calls to the hotline have been significantly reduced. There was a 60% reduction in calls to the hotline in April alone as opposed to April



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of last year. DCF is looking into who called the hotline last year and who called this year as well as the types of referrals: abuse/neglect, family needs, basic material needs, children's mental health, etc. DCF is trying to analyze what has changed. One of the biggest changes is that the highest number of calls last year was from schools, not necessarily regarding physical abuse, but parental capacity and substance use. Schools are the number one referent along with law enforcement and medical. Then we looked into the racial makeup because we are looking at disproportionality and disparity in every aspect of our data. DCF determined that schools call in the majority of referrals regarding African American children versus law enforcement, medical or friends/family and anonymous.

DCF will also discuss whether we continue to accept anonymous phone calls. These calls take a lot of time and are typically unfounded or unsubstantiated. Very often what is expressed during the call is not what we find during our investigation. When looking at the budget, DCPP may not need as many investigators if we decide to eliminate things that aren't serving us and are doing more harm to the communities and families. Our caseloads have also dropped. DCPP has had an approximately 40% reduction in caseload since March. Some of the reduction is due to the fact that we are not opening cases. We are only opening cases that are high risk and we are able to close cases that are low risk and no longer need to be involved. DCF is really looking at how staff is being used and whether they can be used in better ways. Commissioner Beyer stated that DCF is looking at where they can grow and develop and look more to prevention. Commissioner Beyer felt that she would like the Task Force to be thinking about the data and the changing landscape within the state as we continue to work together in this new way.

### **2020 Skill Building Conference Discussion**

Daniel informed the Task Force that the 2020 Skill Building Conference would occur this year, but would be held virtually. The members were asked for input of topics, themes, or speakers that they might like to see for this year's conference. The following suggestions were made:

- What DCF is doing regarding race equity
- NJ's response to COVID-19
- Atrocious cultural experiences
- Partnership between law enforcement and mental health services

Daniel agreed to send an email to the Task Force asking for further ideas for the Skill Building Conference.

### **Subcommittee/Committee Updates**

#### **Prevention Committee**

Patty Mojta informed the Task Force that the Prevention Committee is working on the next Prevention Plan. Patty explained that the Committee is using the CDC Technical Framework for Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect as the starting point. The Committee will be adding issues related to COVID-19 as well as systemic racism issues in NJ. Patty informed the Task Force that Sanford Starr, Deputy Director of DCF Family and Community Partnerships will be the new co-chair of the Prevention Committee.



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### **Protection Committee**

Richard informed the Task Force that, at their last meeting, the Protection Committee had two presentations. The first presentation was from Nancy Carre-Lee, Director of the DCF Division of Child Protection and Permanency, regarding how DCPD has been adjusting to issues related to COVID-19. The second presentation was from Charyl Yarborough from the DCF Office of Quality, who facilitated a focus group with the Committee regarding quality service standards and access to services. The Digital Realm of Child Abuse workgroup is developing a report with recommendations for schools regarding protecting children from online threats and efforts to educate parents and young children. The Juveniles with Sexually Inappropriate Behaviors workgroup has had several volunteers to join and will begin meeting again in the coming weeks. Richard informed the Task Force that the Protection Committee continues to seek areas to focus on and is open to taking on new projects.

### **Staffing and Oversight Review Committee**

Marygrace informed the Task Force that the SORS had two meetings since the previous Task Force meeting. The SORS was provided with a presentation from Suzanne Alvino, Administrator of the DCF Office of Training and Professional Development as well as a presentation from Dawn Marlow, DCF, regarding the Resource Family Survey. Marygrace also informed the Task Force that the SORS has begun to review their annual plan and report. Marygrace stated that attendance and participation at the meetings has been excellent.

**Next Meeting – September 25, 2020 in Trenton.**