



SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN

Nydia Monagas, Chair
Greta Anderson, Co-Chair

"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."

**Please note the meeting was recorded for the transcription of minutes.*

January 15, 2025
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.
Meeting Minutes

Attendance:

Members

Nydia Monagas, New Jersey Children's Alliance
Michele Renner, Catholic Charities
Greta Anderson, Department of Children and Families
Jill Pniewski, Department of Children and Families
Anthony Camelli, Families and Communities Together
Ron Welsh, DAD's Council, Public Member
Lorene Wilkerson, NJ Child Placement Advisory Council
Caryn Hirsch, Catholic Charities Diocese of Trenton
Commissioner Beyer, Department of Children and Families
Devin DeFoe, Partnership for Children of Essex
Rachel Silliman-Cohen, New Jersey CARES Institute
Lisa DeLorenzo, Partnership for Children of Essex
Dayna Zatina-Egan, Center for Autism and Early Childhood Health, Montclair State University
Amber Floyd, Specialized Care Coordinator- Mercer County
Carrie Speiser, Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey
Mary Coogan, Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Juanita Johnson-Brooks, PEI Kids
Dr. Martin Finkel, NJ CARES Institute

Guests

Michael Blandi, Department of Children and Families
Kate Bradley, Department of Children and Families
James Scaringelli, Office of School Bus Safety, NJ Department of Education
Sharon Anderson, Partnership for the Children of Essex

Staff

Bethany D'Amelio, Department of Children and Families

Introduction:

On January 15, 2025, the committee convened to discuss significant legislative issues related to child welfare, transportation safety, and advocacy strategies. The following summarizes the key points and discussions from the meeting. This document is intended to inform the general public on the proceedings and insights shared during the session. Public notice was read and the meeting was called to order.

1. Legislative Advocacy:

- *Presentation Overview:* The committee focused on practical strategies to engage with legislators. It was emphasized how essential it is for advocacy groups to have a well-defined strategy when discussing potential legislation with state lawmakers. This involves knowing the precise ask and articulating the importance and urgency of the legislative needs.
- *Engagement Strategies:* Participants were encouraged to consider potential supporters and opponents of their legislative ideas. Engaging with diverse stakeholders, including advocacy groups, can provide crucial support or address opposition early.
- *Governor's Office Involvement:* The necessity of educating members of the legislature and the Governor's office on the import of proposed bills was highlighted. Participants were urged to be proactive in this area.

2. Bill Introduction and Tracking:

- *Existing and New Legislation:* Discussed methodologies for identifying whether new legislation is required or if existing laws could be modified. The committee underscored the need to thoroughly research if similar bills already exist before proceeding with new proposals (Pass the Trash legislation as an example).
- *Sponsorship:* Critical considerations involved selecting the right sponsor by evaluating prior legislative record or district needs that align with the bill's goals.

3. School Transportation Safety Initiatives:

- *Presentation by the Office of School Bus Safety:* The discussion revolved around augmentative measures for school transportation, particularly for children with special needs. This included recommendations for maintaining transparent communication lines between transportation providers and families.
- *Compliance and Enforcement:* Addressed the significance of regulations ensuring safety in student transportation. The committee explored future legislative recommendations emerging from studies in collaboration with Rutgers University, aimed at promoting safety and compliance among transportation entities.

4. Open Forum and Q&A:

- The session concluded with an open forum during which attendees could seek clarification on various topics discussed. An important highlight was preparing for future meetings that will deliberate on charter development and evaluating current membership applications.

Next Steps:

- The committee will reconvene on February 19, 2025, to further discuss the charter draft and review applications for membership. Additional time will also be allocated for reflecting upon the ideas and proposals shared at this meeting.

Conclusion:

The committee remains committed to advancing the legislative agenda concerning child welfare through informed advocacy and stakeholder cooperation. The public is encouraged to remain engaged and informed about the ongoing legislative processes.

This memo aims to maintain transparency and provide the public with an overview of the task force's recent deliberations. The committee values community input and engagement as we collectively strive to enhance the welfare of children and families across New Jersey. This meeting report was prepared, in part, with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

For further information or queries, the public can reach out via the contact channels provided by the Department of Children and Families.