

NEW JERSEY TASKFORCE ON CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

13TH ANNUAL REPORT

*PROCEEDINGS AND FINDINGS FOR
THE PERIOD OF JULY 2022- JUNE 2023*



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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 & 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.

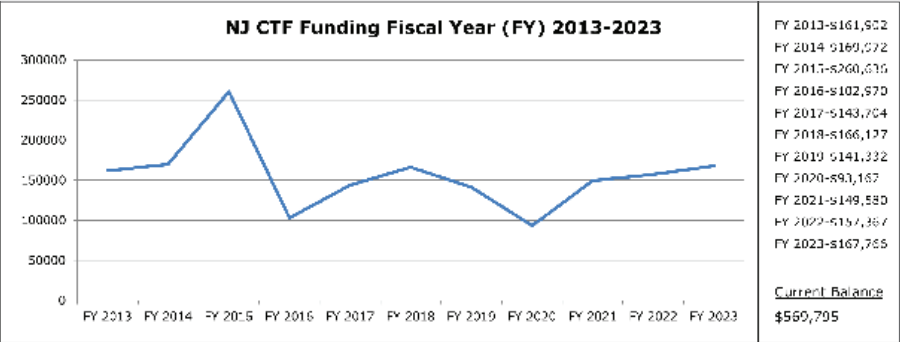
CJA funds are also used to establish and support programs to improve New Jersey's child protection system in a manner that limits additional trauma to child victims of abuse and neglect. In accordance with the NJTFCAN's Three-Year Assessment for 2021 to 2024, model programs and innovative approaches 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 FUND

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 NJ 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 2013 - 2023:



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, 2022 and June 30, 2023. Throughout the reporting period, the NJTFCAN was provided with regular updates regarding DCF initiatives. In September 2022, the Task Force was provided updates regarding the statewide Child on Child Sexual Abuse (COCSA) Response Workgroup. The workgroup, composed of various stakeholders, convened in February 2022 to discuss how to create a systemic response that is coordinated, comprehensive, and ensures that all children gain access to evidence-based trauma-informed services. To inform this process, the workgroup collected data, including conducting a survey of the MDTs and CACs in New Jersey to assess their response to child-on-child cases, what barriers exist to working with these children and families, and barriers to accessing services. Another survey was conducted targeting caregivers who have been affected by child-on-child sexual abuse or sexual activity. The survey asked caregivers to share their experience accessing services and any barriers they faced. The workgroup also contained a subcommittee that focused on local and national funding as well as a subcommittee that examined where there is expertise on working with these populations and where there are gaps in training across the state. The Task Force was informed that funding was allocated to hire case managers for every county to provide services to children that are not involved with the DCF Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP). DCF has created a unit at their State Central Registry (SCR) to provide additional case management services for Information & Referral (I&R) cases to ensure that other services or investigation is not warranted.

During this meeting, members were also provided with a presentation from Theodore P. Cross, Ph.D., Cross Associates, regarding their "Evaluation of New Jersey Child Maltreatment Data Collection Systems". Dr. Cross explained the areas on which they focused during this evaluation, the data sources that were examined, and the findings of the evaluation. Additionally, Dr. Cross provided a list of recommendations to further improve data sources in the state.

In December 2022, Commissioner Beyer provided additional updates regarding the COCSA workgroup. In October 2022, the workgroup released a draft of their plan for comment and recommendations. The plan itself is structured to examine how referrals that are not identified as acceptable for a child protective investigation or child welfare assessment are handled. The population of cases are those that DCPP would not investigate or assess as the facts of the case do not indicate that the incident was caused by a parent or guardian (in a caregiving capacity) or that the situation involved a parent/caregiver/guardian allowing, even if not directly participating, harm to children. DCF created a specific unit that will specialize in this population and will refer to law enforcement or clinical case managers. Commissioner Beyer spoke about funding for the COCSA training as well as funding for the children and families that need treatment and are not covered by insurance. DCF has created a fund, currently being referred to as "Children's Treatment Fund", specifically for this population of victims and actors. Additionally, the Task Force discussed using funding to provide training to clinicians to provide treatment for problematic sexual behaviors in children. Commissioner Beyer also provided an update regarding the change in legislation for the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee. The legislation was introduced in March 2022 by the Senate President and the Assembly Speaker. It is an element in the negotiated exit plan that, together with the monitor and plaintiff, was brought to and accepted by the judge. The legislation includes language that states that DCF would make available the information to the SORS that was previously provided to the federal monitor. Additional seats will be added to the SORS as well as additional responsibilities and an expansion of their current mandate. This legislation was approved in December 2022. Following the passage of the legislation, additional steps were necessary. These steps included a Fairness Hearing, in which the judge determined that the court no longer needed to provide oversight and a 6-month period during which the monitor's staff continued to be involved with the SORS to assist with the transition.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES CONT.

In April 2023, Mary informed the Task Force that after 20 years, Judge Stanley R. Chesler signed a court order that ended Federal oversight of NJ's child welfare system and applauded DCF for the improvements that have been made to the system. Mary congratulated and acknowledged the work of Commissioner Beyer and DCF staff.

Commissioner Beyer provided Task Force members with updates on the following DCF Initiatives: Universal Home Visiting, New Jersey Statewide Student Support Services (NJ4S), Powerful Families, Powerful Communities, and the Family First Prevention Plan. Additionally, Commissioner Beyer asked DCF First Deputy Commissioner, Katie Stoehr, to speak about the "Four Branch Institute". Katie explained that the "Four Branch Institute" was a group of people that represented the three traditional branches of government – Judicial, Executive, and Legislative – but with an additional fourth branch - constituents that have been impacted by the child welfare system in NJ. Katie spoke about the topics that were discussed and the recommendations that were made by those involved. Katie also discussed how the NJTFCAN and its subcommittees were having similar conversations and doing similar work. Katie proposed that the NJTFCAN create a subcommittee that is dedicated to examining issues of poverty and neglect. Task Force members agreed that it would be more effective to work together with DCF rather than working separately and receiving updates. The Task Force created a 4th subcommittee named the Subcommittee on Poverty and Neglect (later changed to the Subcommittee on Race, Poverty, and Neglect).

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**



2022 SKILL BUILDING CONFERENCE

Building Your Knowledge: Filling the Child Welfare Toolkit

NJTFCAN, in collaboration with DCF and Stockton University Child Welfare Education Institute, hosted a skill building conference entitled, "Building Your Knowledge: Filling the Child Welfare Toolkit"

This conference was held in-person and live streamed on Friday, October 21, 2022, and included leaders in New Jersey's child welfare arena focusing on the many ways in which child protection workers can support and protect children and families throughout the State. This conference offered 4 hours of Continuing Education (CE) for Social Workers.

Through this event, participants:

- learned more about home visitation programs in New Jersey;
- Gained a deeper understanding of what "children with problematic sexual behaviors" means, when child sexual behaviors are a problem, and understand the factors that increase the likelihood of youth developing problematic sexual behaviors;
- Learned about the barriers to mental health treatment and the dispelling of myths surrounding mental health treatment;
- Gained a better understanding of the social and emotional development of infants and seven guiding principles of infant mental health. Participants learned how infant mental health is connected to child protection and how wellness, preventing early toxic stress and trauma, and intervening as early as possible is important.





NJTFCAN RECOMMENDATIONS TO DCF

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

1. DCF continue its work with diversity, equity, and inclusion in training, policy and practice, and implementation.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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. DCF continues to promote and encourage the development of protective factors across the life span or from birth through adulthood.
5. DCF to continue its commitment to implementing and supporting the Problematic Sexual Behavior Response Framework including the child treatment fund, training of mental health providers, training of stakeholders, support of case manager positions, and data collection and analysis.
6. DCF to continue to engage with individuals with lived experience and to assist with adding additional individuals with lived experience to the NJTFCAN committees and workgroups.
7. DCF to provide additional training regarding mandated reporting and appropriate reporting. DCF to provide updates on any changes in law, policy or practice related to reporting of child abuse and neglect to other departments and agencies so that they can update their training materials.



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 4 full-committee meetings and 3 ad hoc workgroup meetings between July 2022 and June 2023. All meetings were held virtually.

During the past year, the Prevention Committee focused on tracking the progress, accomplishments and challenges of 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.

Prevention Committee Continued

Each meeting focused on a specific priority area. We heard from a panel of presenters at each meeting about their work in New Jersey and beyond. The committee then had a facilitated discussion following the panel presentations to identify areas of strength and areas of growth in our state. Each discussion culminated in recommendations or next steps for the committee. During this report period, the committee discussed the first 3 priority areas. The committee will continue to review each priority area throughout the upcoming year.

In addition, the committee took steps to begin recruitment of new membership. The committee convened a group with representation from the other Taskforce committee to develop a recruitment letter, recruitment flyer, and recruitment plan.

Next Steps:

In the next fiscal year, the Prevention Committee will continue to review the 2022-2025 Prevention Plan with conversations focused on the next 3 priority areas. These discussions will culminate in a written report on the progress and recommendations moving forward. The Prevention Committee will also continue to 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 purpose of the committee is to help state institutions, particularly the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, better protect New Jersey's children through the development and implementation of recommendations, strategies, and collaborative efforts that address particular child protection issues, educational opportunities, public policy advocacy, and generation of ideas for better serving children and families who come to the attention of the child protection system. 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 promotion 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 improve the child welfare and juvenile justice systems' responses to cases involving children with problematic sexual behaviors. The workgroup continues to address this issue in the following four areas: tracking of PSB cases; training; exploring policy and legislative efforts; and, making recommendations for enhancing systems' responses to PSB cases.

In February 2022, a statewide PSB Response Workgroup was convened to ensure that all child victims and child initiators of problematic sexual behaviors and their families have access to specialized medical and mental health services. The Workgroup developed a Framework for providing a consistent response to families affected by problematic sexual behaviors, to include the child victim and the child/adolescent initiator, which was disseminated in May 2023. The framework addresses referral processes; training for mental health providers, stakeholders, and the community; funding to improve access to specialized services; and oversight and quality assurance. The Children with PSB Workgroup has been working in tandem with this statewide workgroup.

State Central Registry (SCR) and the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) provided summary data for PSB cases after their first year collecting data. Results were used to inform the Framework created by the statewide PSB Response Workgroup, as well as to provide guidance for future initiatives for this workgroup. This Workgroup will request data annually to develop recommendations for continuous improvement of our state's response to PSB.

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 provided recommendations to the PSB Response Workgroup about training needs for various professionals who respond to cases of PSB. The Children with PSB Workgroup also developed an educational one-pager about an evidence-based treatment, PSB-CBT (Problematic Sexual Behaviors – Cognitive Behavior Therapy) for policymakers to assist in funding and policy decisions. This Workgroup will develop additional one-pagers, including an overview of PSB and other evidence-based treatment models for policymakers, as well as one-pager for caregivers of children who engage in PSB. In addition, this group continues to monitor the efforts of other states which pursue amending/creating legislation to establish an appropriate response to PSB cases.





Marketing and Fundraising Subcommittee

During this reporting period, DCF continued to develop this 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)

In December of 2022 Legislation was enacted (A3707 see attached legislation) which amends and changes the role of the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS). To that end during 2023 the subcommittee worked closely with DCF and DCP&P to restructure the subcommittee's membership, create a work plan that will meet the expanded expectations, to obtain a data partner to accomplish the work of the legislation and to work toward creating a report to the Administrative Director of the Court, the Governor, and the Legislature for December of 2023.

The legislative mandates for SORS include the expansion of the membership, outlines a myriad of data points and outcomes for families and youth in the purview of the subcommittee to oversee, mandated caseload counts for DCP&P staff, and access to independent contracted staff, and or other resources to insure the subcommittee has the data and information it needs to provide an annual report to the Governor and to the Court.

In the first quarter of 2023 the subcommittee convened and recruited several new members to meet the membership requirement outlined in the legislation. Through a broad network of contacts, the subcommittee was able to identify individuals who represent the cross-section of stakeholders the



SORS Subcommittee Continued

legislation identified as required to achieve the goal of the reconstituted SORS. They are champions in their fields and have the passion and commitment to ensure the requirements in the legislation are met. A resource parent, a kinship parent, an attorney from the office of the Public Defender regularly engaged in the representation of parents in child protection matters, an attorney from the Attorney General's Office, DCF and DCP&P designated staff, the Executive Director of a statewide Child Abuse Prevention Organization, a representative of a state based child advocacy organization, an alumni of the State's resource family care system, a number of public participants that represent human services and youth sectors, and two parent representatives. This expanded the membership to eighteen. We moved our meetings from bi-monthly to monthly and have adjusted the time of the meetings to accommodate the varied schedules of the membership. Several meetings were held with the federal monitor and their team to discuss their process and to glean information related to identifying specific areas of focus for the work ahead.

In the ensuing months, the subcommittee worked with DCF and their procurement team to obtain a data analysis and consultation partner to assist the SORS with the required statutory obligations for the oversight activities. In June, SORS engaged the Camden Coalition to support this work and they have committed their data team and a dedicated child welfare expert to this process. The team immediately began to review the existing data sources and establish a crosswalk between available data and the required areas of focus outlined in the legislation. Meetings were held with all of the SORS members and some external sources to gauge areas of interest and desired focus.

For the remainder of this year, the subcommittee will continue to meet to expand our understanding of the data, to create a plan to meet the expectations of the legislation and to provide a roadmap through our December report as to how we will assess and evaluate this information in a way that is transparent to the public and valuable to the families and children who rely on DCP&P.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a black pencil, poised over a document. The document features various charts, including a pie chart and a bar chart, along with text and tables. The background is slightly blurred, showing another person's hand and a patterned sleeve. An orange rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing white text.

2022 – 2023 PRIORITIES OF THE SORS



In partnership with Camden Coalition:

Identify all of the data sources available and to determine whether additional data is needed to oversee the performance of DCP&P and create key benchmarks for SORS review

To determine additional sources of non-child welfare data relevant to the subcommittee's scope of work and the outcomes of families and children

To determine the timeframe of reference for the report in 2024

To work to continue to increase the capacity of the SORS data IQ through training, ongoing data review and participation in opportunities through components of DCF's COQI process

Across all of the identified areas of focus, find opportunities for family voice and racial equity to be included and uplifted.

Task Force Committees/Subcommittee Membership

Note: All members listed, status of membership, job titles, and organization affiliations are as of June 30, 2023.

Prevention Committee

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Patty Mojta
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Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey

Jeanne McMahon
Director of Health & Family Support Programs
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

Sanford Starr, Co-Chair

Tiffany Tucker, MD
Pediatrician
Advocare Pediatrics

David Seegert, MSW, LCSW
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Sanford Starr
Assistant Commissioner
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Protection Committee

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Therapist

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Jennifer Underwood
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Division of Housing and Community Resources
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Lorene Wilkerson, Chair
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Jacqueline Augustine
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Scout Hartley
ICF Incorporated

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Corinne LeBaron, MSS
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Joshua Levy
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Linda Porcaro, M.A.
Director Office of Youth Services
Somerset County

Garnet Roberts-Batson
DCF Fatherhood Engagement Committee

Katherine Stoehr
First Deputy Commissioner
NJ Department of Children and Families

Traci Telemaque
First Assistant Public Defender
Office of the Public Defender

Robyn Veasey, Esq
Deputy Public Defender
Office of the Public Defender

Honorable Joseph Vitale
Senator, District 19
Designee: Amanda Melillo

Angie Waters
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