

New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect 14th Annual Report



Proceedings and Findings for the period of
July 1, 2023 — June 30, 2024

Co-Chairs, New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

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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, 2024

Ex-Officio Members

Honorable Jacquelyn A. Suárez, Esq.
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Designee: Jennifer Underwood

New Jersey Superior Court Judge
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Honorable Charles W. Dortch, Jr., J.S.C
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Designee: Jacqueline Augustine

Honorable Colonel Patrick J. Callahan
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Honorable Kevin Dehmer
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New Jersey Department of Education
Designee: Sonia Moticha

Honorable Matthew J. Platkin
Acting Attorney General
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Designee: Christian Arnold

Honorable Jennifer N. Sellitti
Public Defender
New Jersey Office of the Public Defender
Designee: Traci Telemaque

Honorable Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq.
Acting Commissioner
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Designee: Wendi White

Honorable Kaitlan Baston, MD, MSc, DFASAM
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New Jersey Department of Health
Designee: Pending

County Prosecutor
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Honorable Sarah Adelman
Commissioner
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Designee: Natasha Johnson

New Jersey State Senate Members

Honorable Shirley Turner
Senator, District 15
Designee: Cindy Cortez

Honorable Owen Henry
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Honorable Nancy F. Muñoz
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Assemblywoman, District 31

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Nydia Monagas, Psy.D.
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Youth Representative
Pending

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Associate Director
Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health
Montclair State University

Corinne LeBaron M.S.S.
Chief Executive Officer
Embrella

Honorable Jason Sarnoski
Warren County Commissioner

Tracy Kaplan
Director of EAP Services
Preferred Behavioral Healthcare

Christina Lazzaruolo
Attorney
Pelletieri, Rabstein & Altman

STAFF

Bethany D'Amelio
NJTFCAN Executive Coordinator



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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 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.

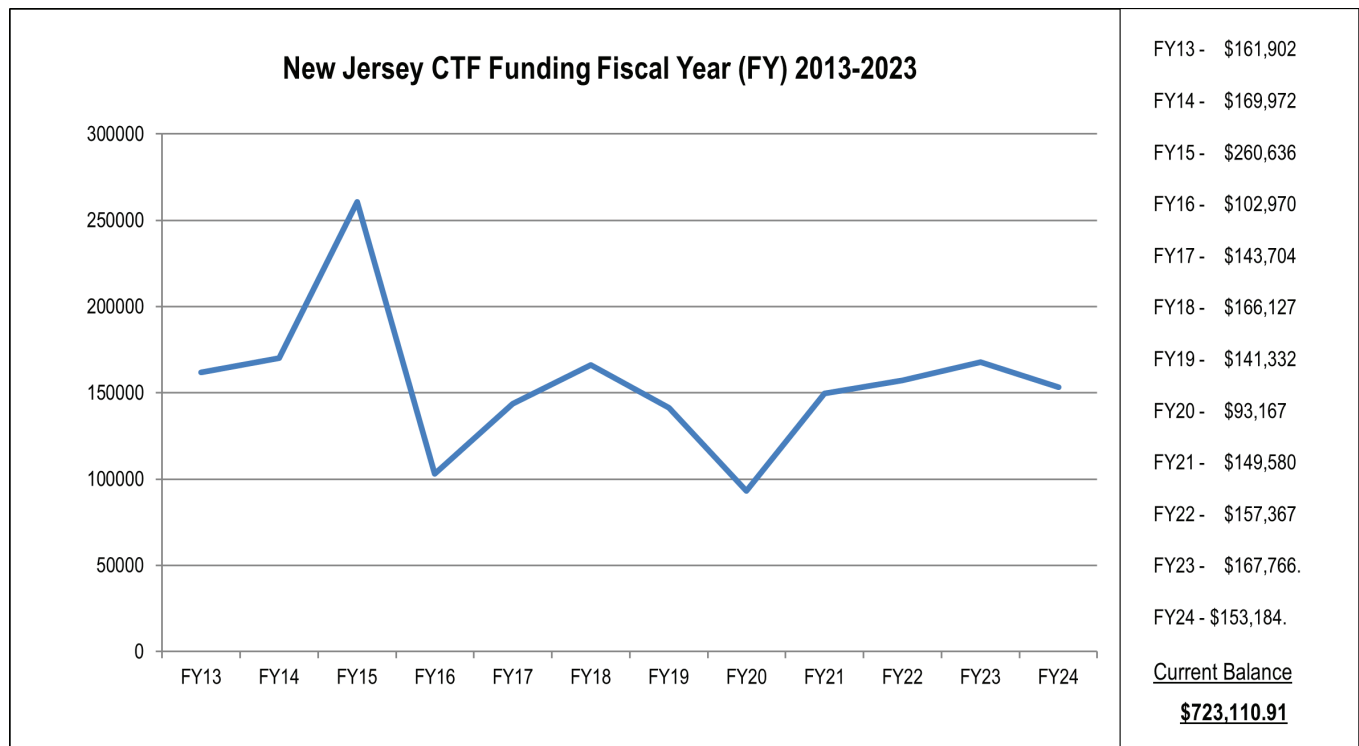
New Jersey Children's Trust

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 that are not appropriated to support child abuse and prevention programs is carried forward into the next fiscal year. These carry-over funds, along with the fiscal year collections from

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 is established to support local child abuse and neglect prevention programs and strategies that implement evidence-based and evidence-informed programs, as well as system-wide efforts to enhance New Jersey's work in this space.

Below are NJ CTF's collections from 2013 - 2024:





NJTFCAN Proceedings

Quarterly meetings provide NJTFCAN with the opportunity to discuss and assess items associated with its statutorily mandated work. With the addition of the subcommittee on race, poverty and neglect in June 2023 and the Development and Fundraising subcommittee in Spring 2024 the Task Force is

now supported by five subcommittees. While the Development and Fundraising subcommittee remains in the development stages, the other four subcommittees meet on a regular basis and report the results of their activities to NJTFCAN. There are over 100 individuals that contribute to this important work.



Summary of Activities

Thoroughly committed to enhancing child-serving systems, NJTFCAN embarked on a vital journey to refine its mission and expand its community engagement in the 2023 – 2024 reporting period. NJTFCAN conducted three key strategic planning sessions between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024. All members of the task force and subcommittees were invited to participate in these meetings. The strategic planning sessions placed a strong emphasis on integrating community voices and those with lived experience into the subcommittees to ensure comprehensive representation and inclusion within the work of the task force.

The strategic sessions led to the formulation of a new overarching vision statement for NJTFCAN, aimed at guiding its future endeavors. Additionally, individual vision statements for each existing and newly created subcommittee were developed to ensure coordinated and focused efforts across all task force activities. NJTFCAN remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting the welfare and protection of children across New Jersey through collaborative efforts with community partners. The revised vision and mission statements embody the dedication to this cause and the aspiration to foster a safer environment for all children.

Proposals for reevaluating subcommittee memberships to include broader representation were discussed, with invitations extended to relevant agencies and departments for comprehensive input. To enrich community understanding and involvement, the task force produced a graphic representation of their refined vision statements which was distributed to committee members, colleagues, and stakeholders to assist in recruitment efforts.

(See page 15 for the NJTFCAN Flowchart of Subcommittees)

As a result of the strategic planning sessions the new Development and Fundraising subcommittee was established to bolster task force initiatives and community outreach. Key objectives include member recruitment with representation from development and fundraising sectors. The Chair of this newly created subcommittee designed an informative slideshow presentation including historical and current context of the Children's Trust Fund, with discussions on national benchmarks and future elevation strategies. This presentation was shared with the task force as well as its subcommittees to build interest and assist with committee membership recruitment efforts.

Additionally, the strategic planning sessions resulted in recommendations to rename the Protection Subcommittee to the Safety of Children Subcommittee and the Prevention Subcommittee to the Family Support and Wellbeing Subcommittee aligning with strategic goals to enhance child welfare. Both committees underwent recruiting efforts which resulted in gaining new members with a passion and commitment to addressing the evolving needs of New Jersey children and families. The committees worked to create new charters and began exploring insights and suggestions to strengthen and refine their priorities for greater impact in 2025, and beyond.

October 2023 NJTFCAN Fall Conference

The 2023 NJTFCAN Biennial Conference discussed the intersection of race, poverty, and neglect in child welfare systems. The conference offered 4.5 hours of Continuing Education (CE) for Social Workers, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, and Licensed Professional Counselors. The event took place on Thursday, October 19, 2023, in Princeton, NJ.

Participants enjoyed a robust agenda including the following presentations:

- Aysha E. Schomburg, JD, Assoc. Commissioner Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families: *"Learn to Quilt: A Federal Perspective"*
- Clare Anderson, MSW, Senior Policy Fellow, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago: *"Evidence at the Intersection of Child Welfare & Economic and Concrete Supports"*
- Lisa Mishraky-Javier, LMSW, Senior Associate Center for the Study of Social Policy: *"Anti-Racism in Child Welfare: Moving from Awareness to Action"*
- Mary E. Coogan, Esq, President & CEO Advocates for the Children of New Jersey: *"Why data is important: Supporting the need to reform."*
- Katherine Stoehr, First Deputy Commissioner New Jersey Department of Children and Families: *"Introduction to the 4 Branches and Call to Action"*

NJTFCAN Sponsored Trainings

Each year, NJTFCAN sponsors multidisciplinary training programs to improve the handling of child abuse and neglect cases. 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:

FW/CF NJ Forensic Interview Training is an intensive five-day training course in which students learn the necessary skills to conduct a competent investigative interview of a child abuse victim using the ChildFirst® forensic interview process. This interactive course combines multi-disciplinary lectures with demonstrations and hands-on experience.

Number of trainings held: 3

Total number of professionals trained: 133

Forensic Interview Refresher Training, reviews the content from the ChildFirst® Forensic Interview protocol. Refresher training will focus on the practical application of the Finding Words/ChildFirst protocol to ensure that the interviewer has the skills needed to complete a competent Forensic Interview of a child abuse victim. This training will be a 1-day, in-person session, that will be held regionally.

Number of trainings held: 2

Total number of professionals trained: 25

Expanded Forensic Interview (EFI) Training (ChildFirst® EX), is 3-day training that provides a defensible process for conducting interviews with children who may not disclose in a traditional single-session forensic interview due to trauma, development, special needs, other complicating issues including poly victimization.

Number of trainings held: 2

Total number of professionals trained: 32



NJTFCAN Recommendations to DCF

The New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect recommends that DCF persist in the endeavors of its Transformational Offices to deepen understanding and alleviate Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These efforts are critical in recognizing the profound impacts such adversities have on individual health, mental stability, and economic security over the long term.

The task force also recommends DCF remain dedicated to embedding a healing-centered approach into its mission. By employing evidence-based practices to address trauma at its source, DCF can effectively foster recovery and enhance the well-being of communities across New Jersey. Additionally, it is advised that DCF continues to promote the development of protective factors designed to shield families from the harmful

effects of toxic stress. Such initiatives empower families to maintain resilience and cohesion in the face of adversity.

Lastly, the task force emphasizes the significance of integrating insights from individuals with lived experiences into DCF's initiatives and recommends continued dedication to this practice. By doing so, DCF can enrich its strategies and markedly improve outcomes for individuals and families throughout the state.

We believe that these recommendations will significantly contribute to the positive transformation of services provided by DCF, ensuring the betterment of our communities.



Work of the NJTFCAN Committees

Subcommittee on Race, Poverty and Neglect

In 2023 the NJTFCAN Subcommittee on Race, Poverty, and Neglect was convened to examine ways in which the current operation of the child welfare system in New Jersey conflates poverty and neglect, and to examine ways in which racial inequities drive and compound that conflation. This subcommittee has reviewed data indicating that 80% of the referrals made to the New Jersey Child Abuse Hotline are related to allegations of neglect. Within this significant percentage, a disproportionate number of referrals concern children from Black and Hispanic communities. However, it is critical to highlight that only approximately 3% of these referrals are substantiated. This discrepancy has prompted the subcommittee to initiate a deeper investigation to understand the dynamics behind the referrals, including identifying the sources of such reports and examining the motivations that drive these calls to the hotline.

The subcommittee contracted the assistance of Action Research to conduct focus groups with mandated reporters in healthcare, education, and

law enforcement sectors. The insights from the focus group interviews, combined with survey responses from the recent conference along with the expertise of the membership, which includes representation from the Departments of Education, Human Services and Children and Families, child abuse prevention partners, and people with lived experience are under analysis and the committee is preparing to disseminate findings in early 2025. This subcommittee is examining both the current training efficacy and the workflow of mandated reporters to propose enhanced education methods.

Building upon a comprehensive report from the National Academy of Sciences, the subcommittee focus has shifted towards preventive strategies, not just mitigation. A research fellow is engaged in further analysis. The subcommittee aims to integrate these insights into policy framework designed to prevent child poverty actively. Members are committed to converting recommendations into practical implementation strategies. Dialogues on the next

steps post-recommendation are on the agenda for future discussions.

Efforts are ongoing to expand lived experience representation and include law enforcement perspectives within the subcommittee, which remains

dedicated to establishing meaningful change in child poverty reduction and values the continued engagement of diverse stakeholders in this vital initiative.

Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS)

In June 2023, SORS engaged the Camden Coalition to support their data analysis work which involved a committed data team and a dedicated child welfare expert to assist in gathering and analyzing available data points. 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 the SORS members and some external sources to gauge areas of interest and desired focus.

SORS spent the majority of the reporting time period conducting meetings with DCF staff to examine information briefs and gain a better understanding of the data. SORS worked very closely with the Camden Coalition to develop the First Annual Performance Report on the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency which was distributed to the New Jersey Governor's office, New Jersey Legislature as well as online and with colleagues and interested stakeholders in early 2025.

The Subcommittee on the Safety of Children (previously the Protection Committee)

In March 2024 the Protection Subcommittee transitioned to the Subcommittee on the Safety of Children as a result of the NJTFCAN strategic planning efforts. The newly named subcommittee conducted recruiting efforts which resulted in a diverse membership of DCF and non-DCF stakeholders eager to work together to help protect New Jersey's children. The committee worked to create the following vision statement:

To develop recommendations for child-serving systems to better protect New Jersey's children, and to respond to, learn from and improve conditions in those same institutions, to specifically support the physical and emotional safety and wellbeing of all New Jersey's children.

As the vision statement reflects, the orientation of this subcommittee will be on efforts to protect children in non-DCPP settings such as schools, on school buses, congregate care facilities and childcare facilities. The Task Force thought it important to be deliberate about expanding the scope of this subcommittee

beyond DCF divisions, since the SORS sub-committee has the legislative mandate to review the internal policies, procedures and practices of the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP).



The Family Support and Child Wellbeing Subcommittee (previously the Prevention Committee)



As this subcommittee transitions from the Prevention Subcommittee to the newly formed Family Support and Child Wellbeing Subcommittee, they are diligently reviewing and updating their charter and onboarding process to ensure alignment with their mission. The purpose of this committee is to review the current structure of family and community supports and advocate for the continued development of non-

stigmatic, culturally appropriate, accessible, high-quality resources, and opportunities for all residents of New Jersey.

In the immediate future, their primary focus is the recruitment and retention of dedicated new members who are passionate about this critical work. They are committed to a streamlined, informative, and welcoming onboarding experience to engage new members effectively equipping them to make meaningful contributions to the Subcommittee's efforts.

The review of the 2022 - 2025 Prevention Plan is underway, aiming to assess and determine which original priority areas should continue while they explore new priorities that address the evolving needs of the families and children in New Jersey.

In collaboration with the Subcommittee on Race, Poverty, and Neglect, this subcommittee is actively working to expand the roster of community-based supports available to families in New Jersey outside of the child protection and permanency system, ensuring that all families, regardless of their circumstances, have access to the necessary resources and services to thrive.

Development and Fundraising Subcommittee

This newly formed subcommittee worked to recruit members with backgrounds in fundraising and marketing strategies and developed the following vision statement.

The NJTFCAN is responsible for overseeing & approving expenditures from the NJ CTF, a private/public partnership created by law to fund child abuse

and neglect prevention programs in New Jersey. The goal of this committee is to raise awareness of the CTF and its activities, and to raise funds for child abuse prevention in New Jersey.

This subcommittee plans on establishing new funding relationships and promoting the work efforts of the full Task Force and its subcommittees.



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

NJTFCAN Flowchart of Subcommittees

NJTFCAN

To develop and advance recommendations, in partnership with constituents, regarding local and state strategies and connections that are designed to strengthen New Jersey's broader child and family serving systems, to help communities thrive, and to ensure children, youth and families succeed.

Family Support and Child Well-being

Analyzes family and community supports to assess and review ways to accomplish non-stigmatic, culturally appropriate, accessible, high-quality services for all NJ residents.

Development and Fundraising Committee

The NJTFCAN is responsible for overseeing & approving expenditures from the NJ CTF, a private/public partnership created by law to fund child abuse and neglect prevention programs in NJ. The goal of this committee is to raise awareness of the CTF and its activities, and to raise funds for child abuse prevention in NJ.

SORS

Under the legislation establishing DCF, the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee shall review staffing levels of CP&P to develop recommendations regarding the most effective methods of recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff within the division.

Subcommittee on Race, Poverty and Neglect

The subcommittee on Race, Poverty and Neglect was convened to examine ways in which the current operation of the child welfare system in New Jersey conflates poverty and neglect, and to examine ways in which racial inequities drive that conflation and are compounded by that conflation.

Subcommittee on the Safety of Children

To develop recommendations for child-serving systems to better protect NJ's children, and to respond to, learn from and improve conditions in those same institutions, to specifically support the physical and emotional safety and wellbeing of all NJ's children.

NJTFCAN Committees/Subcommittee Memberships

Note: All members listed, status of membership, job titles, and organization affiliations are as of June 30, 2024.

Family Support and Child Wellbeing Subcommittee *(Previously Prevention Subcommittee)*

Corissa Kazar, Co-Chair

Sanford Starr, Co-Chair

Sanford Starr

Assistant Commissioner

DCF Division of Family and Community Partnerships

Corissa Kazar

Director of Family Support

Embrella

Suzanne Conrad, M.A., R.N., L.P.C.

Consultant

Diane Dellanno, LCSW

Senior Policy Analyst

Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Nicole Epps

Managing Director, Programs & Policy

World Childhood Foundation

Aldina M. Hovde

Director, Safety & Trauma Informed Care Initiatives

New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Patty Mojta

Director of Community Engagement

Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey

Jeanne McMahon

Director of Health & Family Support Programs

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

Tiffany Tucker, MD

Pediatrician

Advocate Pediatrics

David Seegert, MSW, LCSW

Director – School Based Youth Services Program

Preferred Behavioral Health Group

Svetlana Shpiegel, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, MSW Program Director

Department of Social Work and Child Advocacy

Montclair State University

Wendi White, MA, R-DMT

Vocation Program Specialist

Office of Substance Abuse Programming & Addiction Services

Department of Corrections

Subcommittee on the Safety of Children *(Previously Protection Subcommittee)*

Nydia Monagas, Co-Chair
Greta Anderson, Vice-Chair

Honorable Christine Norbut Beyer, M.S.W.
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Children and Families

Greta Anderson
Director of Investigation
Department of Children and Families
Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit

Joyce Applegate, LCSW
Clinical Supervisor
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen

Eileen Caraker, RN, MSN
FN-CSA, SANE-A, SANE-P
SART, FNE Coordinator
Gloucester County Prosecutor Office

Martin A. Finkel, DO, FACOP, FAAP
Professor Emeritus
Rowan University

Scout Hartley, MPA
ICF Incorporated

Liza Kirschenbaum, Esq.
Associate Director
Court Appointed Special Advocates of New Jersey

Lisa Landsman
Consultant

Nydia Y. Monagas, Psy.D.
Director of Training and Statewide Initiatives
New Jersey Children's Alliance

Sonia Moticha
Student Support Specialist
New Jersey Department of Education

Jane Reynolds, RN, MSN
FN-CSA SANE-P
Forensic Nurse Coordinator
Mercer County Sexual Assault Response Team
Mercer County Prosecutor's Office

Debbie Riveros
Executive Director
New Jersey Children's Alliance

Judy L. Spinney, LCSW
Therapist

Richard Stagliano
President and CEO
Center for Family Services

Jennifer Underwood
Administrator
Office of Community Services
Division of Housing and Community Resources
Department of Community Affairs

Lorene Wilkerson
New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council

Jacqueline Augustine
Administrative Office of the Courts

Subcommittee on Race, Poverty and Neglect

Katherine Stoehr, Chair

Katie Stoehr

*First Deputy Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Children and Families*

Mary Coogan, Esq.

*President & CEO
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Natasha Johnson

*Assistant Commissioner
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Nydia Y. Monagas, Psy.D.

*Director of Training and Statewide Initiatives
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Dr. Tiffany Tucker

Pediatric Physician

Eleanor Gilliam

Department of Children and Families

Sonia Moticha

*Student Support Specialist
New Jersey Department of Education*

Kaitlin Mulcahy, Ph.D., LPC, IMH-E IV-C

*Associate Director
Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health
Montclair State University*

Patricia Risch

*Assistant Commissioner
Division of Family Development
New Jersey Department of Human Services*

Larry Braasch

*Deputy Director
Division of Family Development
New Jersey Department of Human Services*

Dr. Veronica Ford

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey

Development and Fundraising Subcommittee

Jason Butkowski, Chair

Jason Butkowski

*Director of Communications
New Jersey Department of Children and Families*

Olga Aramini

New Jersey Children's Alliance

Jose L. Posos, M. Ed.

*Executive Director of Clinical Administration
Circle of Care for Families and Children of Passaic County, Inc.*

Cecile Edwards

*Sr. Manager
New Jersey Birth Equity Funders Alliance*

Dr. Martin Finkel

*Professor Emeritus
Rowan University*

Richard Stagliano

*President and CEO
Center for Family Services*

Debbie Riveros

*Executive Director
New Jersey Children's Alliance*

Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS)

Marygrace Billek, Chair
Lisa Chapland, Vice-Chair

Marygrace Billek, M.S.S.W.

Public member, Volunteer

Lisa Chapland, Esq.

Kinship Resource Parent

Mary Coogan, Esq.

President & CEO

Advocates for Children of New Jersey

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Monmouth Vicinage

Administrative Office of the Courts

Mary Hallahan, M.Ed. L.

Foster Parent

Scout Hartley

ICF Incorporated

Gina Hernandez

Executive Director

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey

Laura Jamet

Assistant Commissioner

Division of Child Protection and Permanency

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Corinne LeBaron, M.S.S.

Chief Executive Officer

Embrella

Joshua Levy

DCF Fatherhood Engagement Committee

Linda Porcaro, M.A.

Director Office of Youth Services

Somerset County

Garnet Roberts-Batson

DCF Fatherhood Engagement Committee

Katherine Stoehr

First Deputy Commissioner

New Jersey 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

Executive Director

CASA of New Jersey