



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

## **PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

Natasha Johnson, Acting Chair  
Niurca Louis, Vice Chair

**March 1, 2018**

**10:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.**

Capital Center Building  
50 East State Street, 2nd Floor  
Commissioner's Large Conference Room  
Trenton, NJ 08625

### **Minutes**

#### **In Attendance:**

Christine Baker	Metro-RDTC at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center
Christine Beyer	Commissioner Designee
Andrea Breitweiser	Department of Human Services
Suzanne Conrad	Prof/Voc. Educational Administrator
Roslyn Dashiell	PEI Kids
Diane Dellanno	Advocates for Children of NJ
Chante Gunter	DCF – Family and Community Partnerships & Div. on Women
Gina Hernandez	Prevent Child Abuse NJ
Natasha Johnson	Department of Human Services
Hannah Kornheilner	Intern – Advocates for Children of NJ
Niurca Louis	Robins' Nest, Inc.
Kerrie Ocasio	Rutgers University School of Social Work
Kathleen Roe	Parents, Inc.
Svetlana Shpiegel	Montclair State University
Charmaine Thomas	DCF – Family and Community Partnerships & Div. on Women
Wendi White	Department of Corrections – Office of Addiction Services

#### **Staff**

Daniel Yale	DCF – Executive Coordinator
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#### **Welcome and Introductions**

A brief welcome was provided by Natasha Johnson and each attendee briefly introduced themselves.



**Review and approve November 2, 2017 Minutes**

Minutes were approved without edits.

**DCF Commissioner Designee Christine Beyer – Vision for Prevention Plan**

Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that she wants her time at DCF to be about increasing prevention work and growing DCF's prevention division. However, prevention work at DCF is bigger than the Division of Family and Community Partnerships because there are opportunities for prevention efforts in each of our divisions, across all of the work that is done in the department, whether it's primary, secondary or tertiary prevention. The Commissioner stated that she will push for everyone across the department to think about the work that we do from a prevention lens, so that an intervention is not necessary at the 12<sup>th</sup> hour when there is nothing left to do except provide deep end interventions and deep end services.

Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that she provided documents that will give the committee a sense of her direction and thoughts. Commissioner Beyer stated that the committee members are a testament to the good work that has been happening in New Jersey. Commissioner Beyer stated that there are incredible opportunities available now due to the recent passing of the Family First Prevention Act. DCF now has an opportunity to fund prevention services, efforts, and activities for families and receive matching federal funds. This will change the face of child welfare across the country in a very positive way because until now we have struggled to fund prevention-first programs that have been proven to work. Until now, federal funding was based on the number of children in out of home care, which was almost a disincentive to reduce the number of children in foster care because the state would lose revenue.

Casey Family Programs has been a huge advocate for federal child welfare finance reform (through the Families First Prevention Act) and has been educating Congress very heavily for the last 8 to 10 years. The Families First Prevention Act was introduced and narrowly defeated in several Congressional sessions, but, according to Commissioner Beyer, its ultimate passage was really a testament to the new Administration for Children and Families (ACF) director, Jerry Milner. Commissioner Beyer stated that she believed that Jerry did a lot of work behind the scenes to get this bill passed. Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that under Jerry's leadership, ACF has also been discussing moving prevention work to the forefront.

Commissioner Beyer provided each committee member with a copy of the CWLA briefing on the Family First Prevention Act. Commissioner Beyer explained that the federal government was working very quickly to provide some guidance to the states and will hopefully be able to provide further information by October of this year. Commissioner Beyer stated that she believes that the guidance will provide more clarity as to how they intend to meet some of the timeframes that are



included in the bill and what will be expected of the states when it comes to billing and producing evidence of different interventions that are utilized.

Commissioner Beyer stated that she also provided each member with a copy of the final report of the Federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities. This Commission, developed under President Obama, met for 18 months traveling around the country, taking testimony, and gathering information about best and promising practices in an effort to develop a national strategy to eliminate child abuse and neglect deaths. Commissioner Beyer stated that there is not a good way of capturing this across the country, as every state captures their abuse and neglect fatalities differently. Commissioner Beyer stated that in New Jersey, we cannot compare ourselves to other states – we can only compare ourselves to ourselves. Child fatalities, what we consider child abuse and neglect deaths, have ebbed and flowed over the years. Often, child fatalities are what define a child welfare or protective services agency in a state. When people think about DCF, they think about child protective services, child deaths, foster care and adoption services but this department, and child welfare in general, is so much larger than that. Commissioner Beyer stated that she would really like to be able to tell the DCF story very differently. DCF will be doing a lot of storytelling and using social media outlets to redefine the way the state thinks about DCF and help people to understand that only a portion of all of the work that we do in this department is protective services.

Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that in DCPD alone, at any point in time, there are approximately 25,000 families open for services, approximately 48,000 children. Only 6191 are in out-of-home care. 86% of our families are served in their own home, in their own communities. Beyond that, we have approximately 50,000 children served in our system of care and tens of thousands more children and families involved with Family and Community Partnerships. Many times, kids and families are served when something happens. DCF gets involved because there has been an incident or they or someone else have identified that there is a need within their family and an intervention is required. Commissioner Beyer stated that she would like DCF to provide as many services as possible to families in their own homes, in their own communities, and build strong families so that they don't get to the point that an intervention is required by DCPD.

Commissioner Beyer stated that the reason that the final report of the Federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities was included was because the Commission identified a significant number of findings and recommendations. One of the top recommendations was home visiting. Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that she had been engaged in a lot of reading and research about the home visiting models that are being used in New Jersey and across the country. If DCF can start to set the stage, in collaboration with the other departments, towards universal home visiting, it would be “game changing.”



Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that she had an opportunity to look at the proposed Statewide Prevention Plan prior to the meeting and that she believed it to be excellent. Commissioner Beyer stated that her vision of prevention and the direction in which she would like to take the Department's prevention initiatives fits very nicely into the strategic priorities. The Statewide Prevention Plan is broad enough that the committee will be able to define what will fall into the objectives. Commissioner Beyer stated that her hope is that the committee, along with DCF, can lead and drive the prevention work within the state.

Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that DCF will not be passive in terms of involvement, but that the committee and DCF should be partnering to increase the State's prevention portfolio. Child abuse prevention is not solely DCF's responsibility because the more we can drive it into the community, the more it strengthens communities to support families where they live, and it will make all the difference in the world. The Commissioner noted that we've been doing a lot of prevention education in this state and while that's important, we want to take it beyond educating and create a framework for how we partner with the other departments within State government. Commissioner Beyer stated that she has a list of which departments we want to bring to the table to develop a much more holistic plan for the state.

Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that two weeks prior to the meeting, the first lady gathered commissioners together to talk about maternal health and the infant mortality rate in New Jersey. Commissioner Beyer stated that New Jersey ranked 47 out of 50 states on infant mortality. During the meeting, the various departments went around the table and talked about some of the work that they were already doing in order to improve healthy outcomes for mothers and children. The one thing that came up repeatedly was home visiting and how four of the departments are already partnering on home visiting activities. Commissioner Beyer stated that she mentioned this meeting to show that this administration is already setting the stage for departments to come together to talk about opportunities for partnership and how we can leverage each other's expertise and resources to have better outcomes for kids in this state.

Commissioner Beyer stated that her charge to this committee is to be bold. We have opportunities for new funding to really think about how we create and build a primary prevention system in New Jersey that not only prevents child abuse and neglect or eliminates child abuse and neglect deaths, but creates healthier communities, healthier families, stronger families going forward.

Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that although she doesn't know many of the committee members and many of the members do not know her, she is not the type of person who just likes to hear herself speak and have everybody agree. Commissioner Beyer stated that she prefers that people don't agree with her as the more opportunity for conversation, dissent and debate, a stronger final product. Commissioner Beyer stated that she encourages her team and all



of the committee members to tell her when they don't agree with her so that they can figure out how were going to do this together.

The committee discussed post permanency discontinuity and the Tuning into Teens program. Tuning into Teens is an evidence-based program that provides an opportunity to examine services for older children. The program is designed to reduce family conflict during middle school years when teenagers are beginning to think differently and how parents deal with the emotional volatility of teens. Although this is a general program, an evaluation was being conducted on an adaptation for the adoption population. The hope is to be able to provide services that fill the gap for younger teenagers.

The committee discussed the value of home visiting programs and how to make the broader community aware of the benefits. Commissioner Beyer stated that there have been compelling outcomes across the country for universal home visiting, not just for particular populations. Commissioner Beyer stated that we also need to make communities aware of other prevention activities and opportunities as well. The focus should not only be primary prevention, but also secondary and tertiary prevention opportunities. Keeping children with family once they have been removed provides better outcomes and we need to look at how we support those families. There are a lot of opportunities looking across the spectrum of programs available to children and families.

There were concerns noted about only using evidence-based programs, even if they are not working or haven't been evaluated. There are many models and programs available. The other issue concerning evidence-based programming is that they are very limiting in terms of who actually qualifies to participate. Should evidence-based programs be used if part of the population does not qualify for services? Ultimately, evidence-based programs or promising practices should be used where possible, although it can be limiting.

The committee discussed having an authentic parent voice at the table to help inform decisions that are being made. Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that she plans to do a listening tour in which she plans to speak to families, parents, and children in their communities. The challenge with speaking with so many people is that each of those people will have different needs. DCF is talking internally about utilizing social media in addition to the listening tour to allow people to comment. This will allow for DCF to determine what parents say they need, what they haven't been receiving and what we haven't been providing. Commissioner Beyer stated that an authentic parent voice is very important and valuable and that she is very open to the idea of having a meaningful parent voice on all committees. Parent-to-Parent programs are also very important in that they allow parents that have been through the system to walk alongside families who are currently going through the system in an effort to support them. Those parent voices are invaluable to help determine how we can strengthen families and provide support.



The committee discussed the issue of parents who are aware of the services that are available but decide not to utilize them. Niurca felt that DCF has a branding issue and that the idea of rebranding is very exciting. When people do not access necessary services for a length of time, the intervention is often much more necessary and expensive. Working to soften the language and communicating with the public to assist them to understand will help them “buy in.” Sue Conrad stated that by utilizing county councils and face-to-face support, we can respond to a lot of the needs that we encounter. Roslyn Dashiell felt that the primary method to deliver prevention services was through DCPD and that because that interaction was sometimes adversarial, it could lead to less utilization of available services. Roslyn was informed that there are a large number of primary prevention programs that touch families on the ground. Specifically, there are 56 Family Success Centers that not only have a large reach amongst communities but have the flexibility to adapt to the population in the community. Commissioner Beyer explained that although DCPD is not the only avenue for some families, it may be the families’ first entry into the system. The question then becomes, how do we best serve them through there? How do we take the stigma out of services? Making some services universal, such as home visiting, will allow for every family to receive services, not just a particular subset of the population. In regard to DCPD being the primary method to deliver services, Natasha felt that the fact that the perception remains that DCPD is the only branch of DCF means that there is an issue with messaging. The proposed Statewide Prevention Plan addresses this issue in the Outreach and Engagement and Community sections.

The committee spoke about holding a reunification day where judges and public defenders would present parents that had overcome obstacles and been reunified with their children. This would help to publicize the services because the Division isn’t presenting the information, the parents or public defenders are presenting the great outcomes. Christine Baker felt that we are losing opportunities to impact primary, secondary and tertiary prevention by not allowing people to talk to people about how services impacted their lives.

The committee discussed the generational stigma that is created by parents who have lost their children and what the children are told about DCPD. Svetlana felt that partnering with other agencies that are more natural to the environment may help people to access services. By taking the services from out of DCPD, the stigma may be reduced. This may a faster and easier way to eliminate generational stigma, rather than trying to fight human psychology. Diane added that co-locating services within the early care and education setting would be a natural environment in which families would be able to access services. In regard to negative imaging, Commissioner Beyer stated that any and all that we do can be presented in a strength-based way, so even if there is intergenerational thinking, we are there to support, not to remove.





The committee was informed that the Department of Health has agreed to include the ACEs survey as part of the [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#) (BRFSS). Commissioner Beyer informed the committee that New Jersey is behind when it comes to collecting ACEs survey data, trauma informed care, and understanding toxic stress and using it to determine health outcomes. Commissioner Beyer stated that she had worked with ACEs for the previous 6 years and ensured the committee that they would be hearing more about these issues from DCF.

Natasha informed the committee that she had been taking notes as the committee was discussing the previous issues and that many of the topics connect to the general buckets that are contained in the Prevention Plan. Natasha reviewed some of the conversations and points that were made throughout the meeting and how they related to the prevention plan.

### **Prevention Plan**

Natasha informed the committee that the plan is intentionally much smaller and leaner than the last plan because the background information from the last plan moves with this one. According to Natasha, the committee didn't feel like it needed to do new research because that was already done. The committee wanted to get more specific than before so that they have tangible things to work on as the plan moves forward. The committee was intentional about the steps not being so specific that committee members felt boxed in, but broad enough that as the committee starts to break into workgroups for each of the categories, they will start to lay out the plan of what they would like to do under each of these categories.

Niurca requested that the committee members begin to think about which workgroup they may feel most connected to and what the beginning work of that workgroup would look like. Niurca reminded the committee that there could be no formalized ideas at that time as the Task Force had not yet approved the plan.

The committee reviewed the proposed prevention plan and discussed any issues that needed to be edited. The committee voted to approve the prevention plan with the suggested edits.

### **Family First Prevention Plan**

Although the Family First Prevention Plan was discussed earlier in the meeting, as it was an agenda item, Natasha asked if there were any specific questions, comments or concerns.

Kathleen Roe felt that, because the bill was passed so quickly, many organizations were unable to comment on it. Kathy also voiced concerns regarding the wording of the bill which states that



families must be at immediate risk of having their children removed and placed in foster care. Commissioner Beyer explained that when this bill was initially brought before Congress in 2016, it was very heavily debated. At that time, there were fears around the congregate care language and concerns that this bill would negatively impact their business model. The bill that was recently passed did not appear to contain any significant changes from the original bill. In regards to the wording of the bill, Commissioner Beyer stated that although the bill does require immediate risk, the language is very broad and there are a myriad of risk factors that can be present.

### **Announcements**

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) recently launched a new advocacy and public awareness campaign called Right from the Start NJ. ACNJ is trying to raise awareness of the needs of infants and toddlers across the state, focusing on early care and education, healthcare opportunities, and family support opportunities. Their website, [Rightfromthestartnj.org](http://Rightfromthestartnj.org), contains further information. ACNJ will be partnering with the Nicholson Foundation, Terrell Foundation, Caucus NJ, and Zero to Three.

ACNJ also has an event titled “Strolling Thunder”, scheduled to take place on May 21, 2018. During this event, ACNJ will be bringing parents, children, babies, and strollers to Trenton to discuss the needs of babies in our state.

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey partnering with NJ Academy of Pediatrics to present a free film series on resilience. Sequel to Paper Tigers. March 1<sup>st</sup> and March 26<sup>th</sup> at Rutgers. Film and training afterwards.

Montclair is starting a new Master of Social Work Program and has just accepted the first cohort of 30 students. The program will be very small and will offer a more “hands on” approach that larger programs no longer provide. The program will need placements to compliment the intense focus on children, youth and families. Svetlana requested that committee members contact her if they have availability for field placements.

DCF will hold a Child Abuse Prevention Conference on April 18, 2018 at the DCF Professional Center. The conference will include workshops provided by the Early Childhood Program, School Based Programs, and a discussion about Sexual Violence Prevention work.

Prevent Child Abuse NJ will hold a Pinwheel Garden on April 13, 2018 at Asbury Park Convention Hall to recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month.





Adjourned.

**Next Meeting – May 3, 2018 at 10:00 a.m. in Trenton (Commissioner’s Large Conference Room)**