

CT Early Childhood Cabinet

Meeting Minutes

October 27, 2015 • 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

Legislative Office Building, Room 2D, Hartford, CT

ATTENDANCE

Member	Member Type	Member	Member Type
Nancy Wyman <i>Lieutenant Governor</i>	Co-Chair	Grace Whitney <i>Director, Head Start Collaboration Office</i>	State Director of Head Start Collaboration
Myra Jones-Taylor <i>Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood</i>	Co-Chair	Cathy Battista <i>Family Resource Alliance</i>	Representative from Family Resource Centers
Roderick Bremby <i>Commissioner, Department of Social Services</i>	Commissioner of Social Services	Patricia Bryant -Beausoleil <i>Director, Putnam Family Resource Center</i>	Representative from a public elementary school with a prekindergarten program
Ellen Cohn <i>Deputy Commissioner, State Department of Education</i>	Responsible for administering the provisions of Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Act	Marisol Estrada-Soto <i>Parent</i>	Parent of a child attending or attended a school in an education reform district
Miriam Delphin-Rittmon <i>Commissioner, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services</i>	Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services	Helene Figueroa <i>Director, Child Care Division CSEA/SEUI Local 2001</i>	Representative of the CT State Employees Association
Harriet Feldlauber <i>Director, Early Care & Education, Office of Early Childhood</i>	Administrator of the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	Linda Francovich <i>Executive Director, Grossman Family Foundation</i>	Representative from the Philanthropic Community
Leah Grenier <i>Budget Analyst, Office of Policy & Management</i>	Secretary, Office of Policy & Management, or designee	Laura Post, Senior Director, <i>Strategic Planning & Insights, LEGO Systems</i>	Representative from the Business Community
Joette Katz <i>Commissioner, Department of Children & Families</i>	Commissioner of Children & Families	Karen Rainville, <i>Executive Director, CT Association for the Education of Young Children</i>	Representative of an association of early education and child care providers
Evonne Klein <i>Commissioner, Department of Housing</i>	Commissioner of Department of Housing	Edie Reichard <i>Director, Sleeping Giant Day Care</i>	Representative of a State-funded Child Care Center
Jewell Mullen <i>Commissioner, Department of Public Health</i>	Commissioner of Public Health	Magdalena Rosales-Alban <i>Director, LULAC</i>	Representative from the Head Start Association
Morna Murray <i>Commissioner, Department of Developmental Services</i>	Commissioner of Developmental Services	Eileen Ward <i>Director, Children's Community Development Center</i>	Representative of Local Providers of Early Childhood Education
Joan Parris <i>Director, ECE, Norwalk CC</i>	Designee for President of Board of Regents	Elaine Zimmerman <i>Executive Director, Commission</i>	Executive Director of the Commission on Children

			<i>on Children</i>		
Maria Synodi <i>Special Education Consultant, State Department of Education</i>	Responsible for administering Section 1419 of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	X	Vacant	Board of Education for a town designated as an Alliance District	
Louis Tallarita <i>State Coordinator, Bureau of Health, Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, State Department of Education</i>	Responsible for coordination of education services to children and youth who are homeless	X	Vacant		
Dianna Wentzell <i>Commissioner, Department of Education</i>	Commissioner of Education				

Attendance Note:

Howard Rifkin, Policy and Legal Counsel, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, attended on behalf of Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman.

Peter Palermino, Social Services Program Manager, Department of Social Services, attended on behalf of Commissioner Roderick Bremby.

Kim Samaroo-Rodriguez, Program Director, Department of Children & Families, attended on behalf of Commissioner Joette Katz.

Rosa Biaggi, Bureau Chief, Department of Public Health, attended on behalf of Commissioner Jewell Mullen.

Steven Hernandez, Director of Public Policy and Research, attended on behalf of Elaine Zimmerman.

A. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor and Howard Rifkin, Policy and Legal Counsel to Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman, provided introductory remarks to the Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet.

Commissioner Jones-Taylor said the Cabinet meeting will open with a presentation from Evonne Klein, Commissioner of the Department of Housing. Commissioner Jones-Taylor will then provide a high-level overview of the policy package drafted by the Cabinet Subcommittee on Families with Young Children without Homes. The package provides policy recommendations how various state agencies improve their policies and practices to better serve families with young children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Following the Cabinet meeting, the Office of Early Childhood will share updates about OEC initiative underway.

The July 30, 2015 minutes were adopted.

Commissioner Jones-Taylor said currently there are an estimated 1,600 young children under the age of 5 in shelters. There are another 3,000 to 9,000 young children who are defined as homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition, which means they could be living in motels, campgrounds, cars or doubling-up in a residence. This is a challenge that Connecticut can meet, said the Commissioner.

B. Department of Housing Presentation

Commissioner Klein said the Department of Housing was created two and a half years ago. Housing programs and services were moved from DSS, DHMAS, DECD, and OPM to the DOH. There are four divisions in the agency: Individual and Family Supports, Policy and Research, Development and Superstorm Sandy.

DOH has taken the lead to create eight Coordinated Access Networks (CANS) across the state. The CANS are leveraging local and regional provider resources to better serve individuals experiencing homelessness or who are at-risk of being homeless. DOH plans to create three positions to support the CANS through data and management.

Commissioner Klein explained that if a person or family is in a housing crisis, they should call United Way 211. The staff at 211 will conduct a brief interview to assess the situation and determine if there are strategies to divert the individual or family from a shelter situation. For example, if a person says he has lost access to transportation and therefore cannot get to work and is now facing eviction, that situation can be resolved with transportation support so the person can work and avoid eviction rather than seeking shelter.

Connecticut has adopted a Housing First policy, which means a person is housed first and then provided the needed supports. Connecticut is the first state in the nation to end homelessness among veterans. DOH is also working to address homelessness among youth. DOH has set 2020 as the target to end family homelessness.

DOH has allocated \$10 million in capital funding to improve shelter facilities, especially amenities that meet the unique needs of families with young children. DOH has also made it a priority to rehabilitate Connecticut's Housing Authority units. Without the Housing Authority units, many of these individuals and families would be homeless.

Commissioner Klein said she has been meeting with municipal leaders to discuss housing needs and to ensure that they are aware of the services offered through her agency. She said DOH is building affordable housing in municipalities of all sizes, both urban and suburban.

Commissioner Klein said Governor Malloy has been a leader on addressing affordable and supportive housing and ending homelessness for veterans, the chronically homeless and homeless families with children.

Grace Whitney, Project Director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office, said Head Start has been involved in a project that provides support to shelters by making them more child- and family-friendly. Head Start has developed a child proof assessment tool that assesses whether a shelter is child-friendly. She offered to partner with DOH on this effort.

Dr. Whitney also cautioned that efforts must be made to ensure the child ends up in a safe situation under the Rapid Rehousing program. Mr. Rifkin clarified that it is not the policy to place families in unsafe housing, such as motels, under the Rapid Rehousing model. Currently, housing and needed supports are provided under the Rapid Rehousing model.

C. Presentation of Homeless Families with Young Children Policy Package

Commissioner Jones-Taylor provided an outline of the draft policy package concerning homeless families with young children. The policy package is a product of the Families with Young Children without Homes Subcommittee to the Early Childhood Cabinet. The Subcommittee, comprised of state agency representatives from OEC, DOH, DSS, DCF, SDE, and DHMAS, the Commission on Children, housing providers, early childhood providers and advocates, met several times through the summer and fall. The subcommittee was charged with identifying high-priority policy shifts within state agencies that can better support the needs of families with young children who are homeless. Commissioner Jones-Taylor said she is proud of the commitment shown from the state agencies and providers.

The policy package highlights three policy areas: health care, early care and education, and housing.

Under health care, DSS is committed to exploring how to access Medicaid funding to implement an intensive case coordination model and evidence-based community and home models with community health workers, intensive case management and care coordination, infant mental health services and family-oriented mental health services for homeless families, families at-risk of homelessness and recently homeless families.

Under early care and education, the OEC is committed to provide homeless families with priority access to early care and education services. The OEC will seek legislation that will provide the OEC Commissioner the authority to make homeless children categorically eligible for the Care4Kids child care subsidy. Making the child categorically eligible means that employment or education and training status will not be a required condition for the subsidy. The OEC will also seek legislation and regulation that provides a 90-day grace period for a homeless family to provide documentation of health and immunization records to a licensed child care setting. Families experiencing homelessness likely do not have quick access to such documentation. This change will allow the child to immediately receive early childhood services.

Under housing, DOH will create preference for homeless families for turnover units in the state-administered Section 8 housing program. DOH will request the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's approval to implement the preference for homeless individuals and families.

Other policy recommendations include the following:

- Identify and connect families with young children who are homeless by using a common screening tool, capturing data about these families and building referral relationships.
- Train early childhood providers, housing staff, addiction services staff, and DCF staff on better meeting the unique needs of families with young children who are homeless.
- Seek new sources of federal, state and private funding and realign existing resources to better serve homeless families with young children.

Commissioner Jones-Taylor said the work to implement the policy recommendations will move to a new family homeless work group under Connecticut's Opening Doors Campaign. Opening Doors is a collaborative effort with the nonprofit Partners for Strong Communities serving as the collective backbone organization. The work group can include members of the existing Cabinet Subcommittee as well as new members. This work group will periodically report back to the Early Childhood Cabinet about progress on implementing policy recommendations. Additionally, DOH will organize quarterly commissioner meetings with OEC, DSS, DMHAS, Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the Department of Corrections (DOC) to ensure timely communication regarding housing-related matters.

D. Cabinet Discussion on Policy Package

Eileen Ward noted that Care4Kids only pays for a portion of the cost of care. She asked since this policy change does not require a parent to be working or in an approved training and education program, will Care4Kids cover the full day of care? Will families have choice about their provider using the Care4Kids subsidy? Commissioner Jones-Taylor said these are important questions to discuss at the working group.

Laura Post said the schools should be tapped as they can often be the best place to identify young children who are homeless.

Peter Palermino said that DSS is examining how TANF funds can support homeless families.

A motion by Peter Palermino for the Cabinet to vote on the policy package was made and seconded by Howard Rifkin. The Cabinet voted unanimously to accept the policy package.

Howard Rifkin said that Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman has reviewed the policy package and is very excited about moving the recommendations forward. The process demonstrates how state agencies can break down silos, collaborate, and leverage each agency's strengths and resources.

E. Next Steps:

Commissioner Jones-Taylor said work is underway to draft a Connecticut Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) plan, which is due March 1, 2015. The Cabinet's State Advisory Council (SAC) Subcommittee will meet later this year and in January to review and comment on the draft plan.

In addition, a new Cabinet Subcommittee on Project LAUNCH will be created. Project LAUNCH is a federal grant awarded to DCF to coordinate and leverage behavioral health services for children birth to age eight. The grant project is addressing the needs of children and families in the Dwight neighborhood in New Haven. The project will inform state-wide policy on meeting the behavioral health needs of young children. Chairs and members of this new subcommittee will soon be announced.

The Cabinet will next meet in January at which time a second area of focus will be shared and discussed. At the January meeting, Cabinet members will learn more about the CCDF draft plan. Updates about the status of Project LAUNCH and upcoming early childhood legislation will be provided.

F. Public Comment:

Commissioner Jones-Taylor opened the meeting to public comment and questions.

Helene Figueroa emphasized the urgency of meeting the immediate needs of homeless families with young children. Family child care providers need to be part of the solution.

G. Adjournment / Next Meeting:

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m. The next meeting will be held in January, a date to be determined.