

FEBRUARY 2020

Department of Children and Families
SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S RIGHT



Commissioner Dorantes and Governor Lamont

The First 365 Days

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Whoa... I need to pull over for this. The offer for the opportunity to serve as the CT DCF Commissioner

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Commissioner Dorantes Speaking at the Clifford Beers Press Conference

Court Monitor Pre-Certifies Social Worker Caseloads.

Monitor's Report Cites "Significant Progress Has Been Made" With Remaining Measures



For the first time since Federal Court oversight began in 1991, the Department has achieved pre-certification of social worker caseloads, according to a report issued on 2/3/20 by the Office of the Court Monitor.

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The Value of the Education Professional Investigation Unit (EPIU)

In the past year, the executive and leadership teams at the Department of Children and Families (DCF) along with school administrators, teachers and their union representatives, have come together to learn how we can improve our collaborative relationships. Among the many important points of discussion were the impact that Careline reports about education professionals have on the schools, the individual personnel involved, and the overall capacity to educate students.

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Enhanced Service Coordination Leads to Greater Matching for Services

The Systems and Organizational Development Division is supporting the statewide launch of Enhanced Service Coordination (ESC). The ESC model focuses on improving matches to services by focusing on a family's needs. The ESC work is now expanded statewide after the model was successfully piloted in Regions 5 and 6.

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Commissioner Dorantes with Waterbury's African American Mayor for the day, Jade Gopie, along with her husband, DCF Program Supervisor, Glaister Gopie



(From L) Commissioner Dorantes celebrating with our community partner, Dr. Alice Forrester of Clifford Beers, along with William Halsey from DSS, Commissioner Delphin-Rittman from DMHAS, Claudette Kidd and Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz



Thank You Representative William Petit for attending the DCF New Britain Listening Tour



Commissioner Dorantes with Secretary of the State Denise Merrill and DCF legislative liaison Vinny Russo.



Commissioner Dorantes with DMHAS Commissioner Miriam Delphin Rittman and Commissioner Jordan Scheff from DDS.



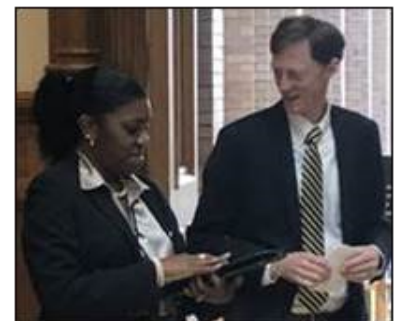
Commissioner Dorantes with Representative Whit Betts



Commissioner Dorantes with Dr. Miguel Cardona, Commissioner of the State Department of Education.



Commissioner Dorantes and Bureau Chief Ken Mysogland appearing on WTIC radio.



Commissioner Dorantes with New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker.

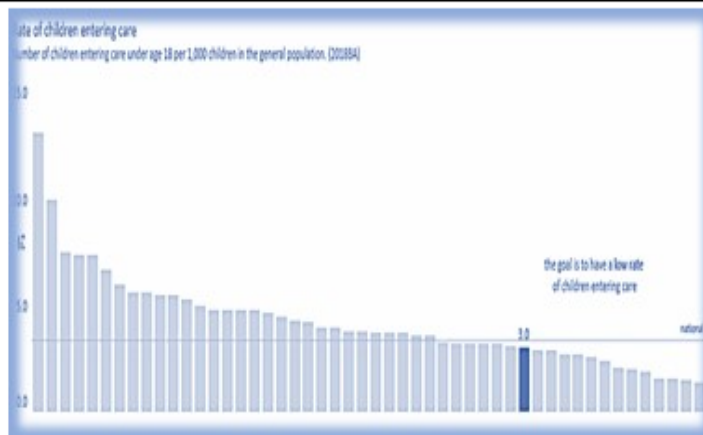
What is Integrated Family Care and Support?

The Department of Children and Families has established a new program leading to the empowerment and strengthening of families - and the core values in our work we strive to achieve each day.

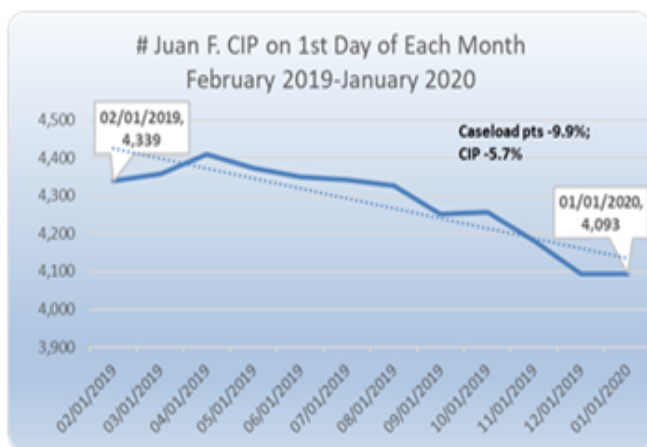
Integrated Family Care and Support (IFCS), engages families while connecting them to concrete, traditional and non-traditional resources in their community, including the full array of Department funded services.

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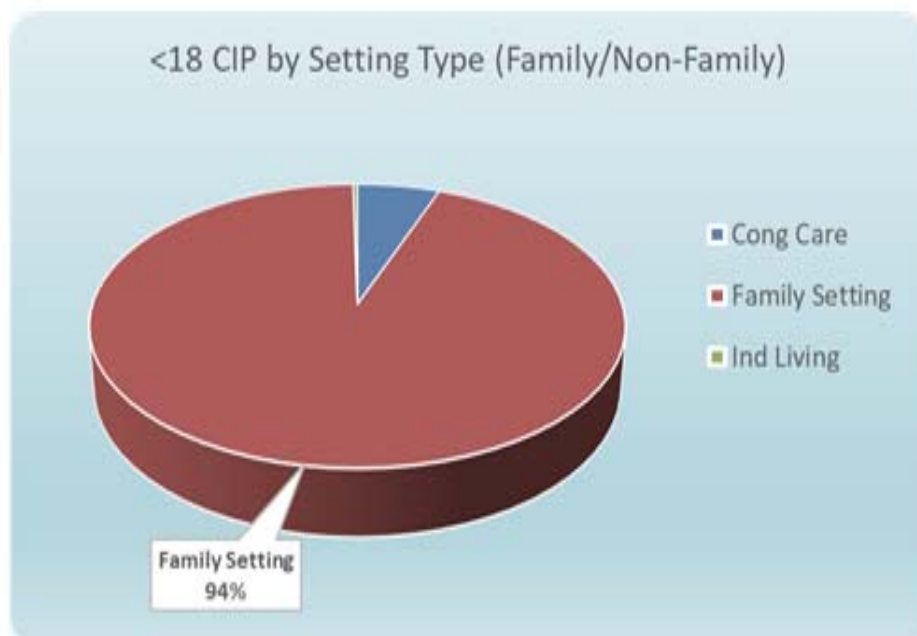
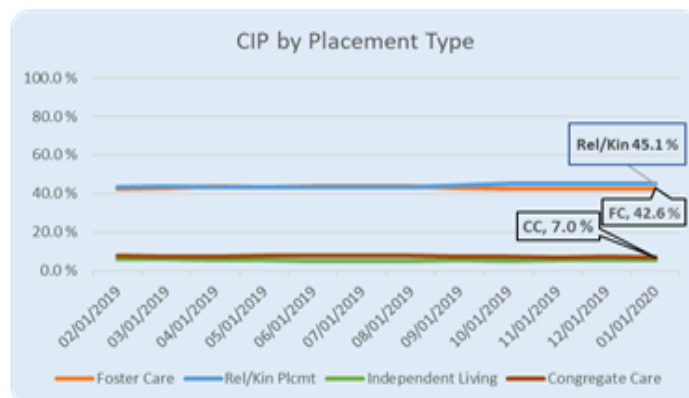
Protecting children by empowering and strengthening families remains the primary focus of our work. In fact, over 91.5% of the time the Department becomes involved with a family, supports are provided which leads to the children safely remaining at home. The chart to the right demonstrates that Connecticut is actually below the national average in the rate of children entering care at 3.0/1000 children and we rank better than most states across the country in this category.



If children must be separated from their parents, 45% of the time they are placed with relatives and kin, lessening the trauma of removal and allowing them to stay connected to their school, friends, neighborhood and reside with people whom they are familiar. Only 7% of children in out of home care are placed into a congregate care facility.



Since 2/1/19, the actual number of children in care by decreased by 9.9%



Overall, 94% of children in out of home care are placed in a family setting!

Our Mission is "Partnering with Communities and Empowering Families to Raise Resilient Children Who Thrive." Here are our overarching goals to guide our path forward.



Organizational Values

Our strategy is about what we aim to do, but it is just as important to set the aspiration for **how** we will work to achieve our goals. To this end, the Commissioner aims to lead an agency that works with purposeful pride and passion for practice and people.

This means:

We work with purpose – we each believe in the vision, and we each know how we can contribute to it

We work with pride – we publicly advocate for the good work we do

We work with passion – we see this line of work as more than a job; we see it as a calling

We prioritize practice – we deliver high quality in what we do

We prioritize people – we see the humanity in everyone, and work to bring out the best in colleagues and the families and children we serve

WEAR BLUE 2020 Photo Contest

View all the wear blue photos [HERE](#)

We announced through our [HART](#) list serve the winner of this year's Wear Blue Photo Contest during January's Human Trafficking Awareness Month... Norwalk DCF is the winner!

**Congratulations to the DCF Norwalk Office....
Awesome picture, clearly gets the point across!!!**



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The First 365 Days

I still remember "the call" like it was yesterday ... The phone rang while driving to pick up my daughter. It was a December afternoon and the number on my phone was one I did not recognize. I picked it up anyway. The voice on the other end said, "...Hey Vanessa, it's Ned Lamont...."

Whoa... I need to pull over for this. The offer for the opportunity to serve as the CT DCF Commissioner.

The first African American Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families.

Incredible responsibility.

Incredible honor.

Humbling.

A year later, I am standing on the chamber floor of the House of Representatives. Listening to Governor Lamont give his State of the State address and around me were the leaders of the state. Legislators, my colleagues from sister state agencies, the media and local elected officials filled the room to capacity.

The pride I felt representing this Department was palpable.

".....And there's Vanessa Dorantes, our Commissioner over at the Department of Children and Families; who rose through the ranks, has dedicated her entire career to our state's children and she is working to guide DCF out from under the Juan F. decree..." I heard the Governor say.



The first 365 days leading the Department has taught me a lot about state government and about myself. I have gained an even greater appreciation for the complexities of our work.

What was that first 365 days like?

What did we accomplish?

Let me take a few moments to tell you our journey so far...

Right away I was tasked with assembling an Executive Team with each member bringing a unique set of talents and perspectives. We took inventory across DCF through domain mapping and focus groups. We began re-aligning agency priorities and centralizing certain functions in order to maximize our productivity and effectiveness.

Immediately, I established the expectation of **supervision** as the foundation for the support of ALL staff within the Dept. This included shifting case specific supervision to occur at least every 30 days rather than 90 days. We made other changes as a result of critical review of our vision, mission and values.

The early stages of this tenure benefitted greatly by the creation of an External Advisory Team made up of 7 individuals with an array of diverse experiences. They still serve as informal advisors and mentors.

The first year saw thousands of miles put on the state vehicle as my team and I traversed the state hearing from our partners. We visited agencies and met their staff. In total, over 300 different meetings and listening sessions resulted in groups providing input to the Department's direction over this past year.

We deliberately used the term **partners** when speaking about stakeholders in communities with whom we interact. These partnerships were strengthened as we experienced the Statewide Advisory Council playing a more active role with the Department and organizing a motivating retreat over the summer.

Consistent with the message of Governor Lamont and his administration to be transparent and collaborate across state systems, we saw our Sister state agencies provide input into the development of our federal **Child and Family Services Plan** including them actually providing letters of support included in the plan.

We are proud of the momentum growing with our community partners. The enthusiasm continued as we commenced our **Family First Prevention Services Act** (FFPSA) work with over 200 partners participating in 5 workgroups influencing the development of Connecticut's Prevention Plan.

A point of particular emphasis this past year was to build upon existing relationships with our legislators. We want to establish a more open and transparent partnership with them. They have been invited to our office listening tours and events in communities. Legislators came in bipartisan fashion. The end result was a very successful initial legislative session but most importantly, the developing trust.

Speaking of listening tours..... Visits began in our Regional Office and Facilities. These have been the highlight of my year!

Talking with staff, hearing their stories, celebrating successes and understanding the struggles...

We also gave space for staff to highlight the positive achievements of each other. The commitment of our workforce is unprecedented.

In an effort to fully inform the public of our work, we also took a more proactive approach with the media and began publishing a *"Spotlight on What's Right"* monthly newsletter. This newsletter highlights positive stories and accomplishments. To increase our public value we must own our narrative and tell our stories.

My first year saw the Careline receive over 100,000 phone calls including 60,000 new reports of child abuse and neglect. Careline established **on-line reporting portals** for non-emergency school, family relations and daycare reports as well for notifications of substance exposed infants to meet Federal requirements. These changes, along with the hiring of additional Careline staff, has resulted in a dramatic reduction in call wait times to the public.

Protecting children by empowering and strengthening families remains the primary focus of our work. We emphasize by correctly assessing risk and implementing community based services, children can remain safely at home. The Structured Decision Making screening, safety and risk assessments tools used daily by our staff were updated with national experts.

Our data shows **91.5%** of the families the Department became involved with were strengthened by the services offered to them, by remaining intact so children can be raised by their own families.

Focused efforts over the past year has resulted in a **reduction of the number of children in out of home care by 9%** since 2/1/19. If children have to be removed, **45% of youth**, were placed with family and kin.

Legal Permanency is a priority in our administration. Timely permanency for those children who needed to find their "forever home". In 2019, we completed approximately **900 adoptions and transfers of guardianships!**

The Foster Care Division was centralized and we experienced a reduction in the time a family waited to be licensed by 50% thru an enhanced licensing model entitled, **"Weekend for a Lifetime."** As the result of a joint partnerships between the Department and the provider community, a new model of Therapeutic Foster Care has been identified.

Services to families received much attention in my first year.

We improved identification of needs and matching families to appropriate services thru the **Enhanced Service Coordination** model piloted in two DCF regions and now scaled up through the rest of the state.

We also developed a new process to help families thru community services without requiring a finding of abuse or neglect. **This Intensive Family Care and Support (IFCS)** program will address the risk factors are identified without the Department having to maintain an open case.

Beacon Health Services, as the administrative services organization, will now work to connect families who are seeking intensive behavioral health services for their children eliminating the need to contact the Department for this assistance.

For the first time since Federal Court oversight began in 1991, the Department achieved pre-certification of **social worker caseloads**. Our sincere thanks to Governor Lamont, the Office of Policy and Management and the Connecticut legislature for providing the Department the support needed to sustain this important outcome for children and families.

In response to our partners in education, we began development of the **Education Professional Investigations Unit** to respond to and investigate reports on personnel of a Connecticut K-12 school.

The **Centralized Transportation Unit**, which will serve to transport families and youth in a more efficient manner and reduce costs, began initial planning.

The **deployment of tablets and continued development of CT-KIND** will enable improved documentation and data collection efforts through technology.

Our work is not done....

In early January, the DCF Executive team held a statewide summit for our leadership teams from all 14 area offices, facilities and central office divisions to clearly **focus the department's vision for 2020**.

The department's executive team is honored to work in this capacity and grateful to the DCF staff for the efforts they put forth on a daily basis as well as our community partners who have walked with us in this journey during our first year.

Court Monitor Pre-Certifies Social Worker Caseloads Monitor's Report Cites "Significant Progress Has Been Made" With Remaining Measures

For the first time since Federal Court oversight began in 1991, the Department has achieved pre-certification of social worker caseloads, according to a report issued on 2/3/20 by the Office of the Court Monitor.

The report says "this is a notable achievement for the state" and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and credits "support from Governor Lamont, OPM (Office of Policy and Management) and the state legislature." The report also says, "It already appears from recent monitoring that meeting this benchmark (caseload standards) is now having a positive impact on the family and child related outcome measures that remain" to be met.

With this pre-certification, the remaining measures of investigations, case plans, needs met, and in-home visitation will continue to be the focus of the Department towards the goal of full compliance. The report notes that "pre-certification" -- the process for approval required under the Juan F. Exit Plan -- is currently underway for investigations and also that the "Department has shown progress" with the segments of the "needs met" goal.

DCF Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes said meeting the caseload goal is a necessary pre-requisite for the Department to conduct quality work.

"First, in the context of the Juan F. Exit Plan, I am pleased that the Court Monitor can "pre-certify" that the Department has achieved maintaining caseload standards. This measure is truly fundamental to all our work. Appropriate staffing equates to better safety decisions, risk assessments and timely intervention for children and families. As we ask our social workers to involve children, families and communities more fully as partners in our work, we must ensure that staff have the necessary time and support to do so. Thus, reasonable caseloads are critically important. Tremendous appreciation and thanks to Governor Lamont, the Office of Policy and Management, and the Connecticut Legislature for their steady and substantial support this past year."

The Value of the Education Professional Investigation Unit (EPIU)

In the past year, the executive and leadership teams at the Department of Children and Families (DCF) along with school administrators, teachers and their union representatives, have come together to learn how we can improve our collaborative relationships. Among the many important points of discussion were the impact that Careline reports about education professionals have on the schools, the individual personnel involved, and the overall capacity to educate students.

In response to these concerns, a major change is being made that we think will significantly improve the investigation process.

DCF is creating a new unit entitled, the Education Professional Investigation Unit (EPIU), which we believe will shorten the time investigations require and create greater consistency in response to allegations. This unit will respond to Careline reports concerning education professionals - in their professional capacity with students - with two dedicated units of Investigations Social Workers. Each unit will have five Investigators and be overseen by a Social Work Supervisor. A Program Supervisor will manage the two units.

The ten Investigators, who will work out of local Department offices across the state, will receive specialized training in school-based investigations and will develop particular expertise and experience. In addition, the protocol for these investigations will be streamlined to reflect the unique nature of school reports.

The EPIU will complete the investigations in a more expedient manner -- a standard of 33 business days compared to 45 days under the existing process. In addition, the centralized supervision and management will lead to more consistent procedures and findings.

The two Supervisors and the Program Supervisor will be located in Central Office of DCF and fall within the structure of the Child Abuse and Neglect Careline. The Program Supervisor is responsible for statewide investigations and each Social Worker Supervisor oversees investigations according to specific regions.

An additional change is that the investigations disposition will receive a higher level of oversight. In the event an investigation has a substantiated finding or any programmatic/systems related concerns, the Program Supervisor shall be consulted and must give approval of such dispositions. An Assistant Legal Director will provide additional legal consultation to the EPIU when there is a decision to substantiate the allegations and will be available as needed for case consultation.

Once the investigation dispositions are approved, an immediate communication shall be sent by DCF to the State Department of Education and Superintendent of the school district where the investigation occurred. A verbal discussion between the Program Supervisor and Superintendent (or designee) may take place as needed.

This change offers greater timeliness and consistency, but also the opportunity to make communication between the Department and the school administration, educators, and their representatives more direct, convenient, and transparent.

Enhanced Service Coordination Leads to Greater Matching for Services

The Systems and Organizational Development Division is supporting the statewide launch of Enhanced Service Coordination (ESC). The ESC model focuses on improving matches to services by focusing on a family's needs.

The ESC work is now expanded statewide after the model was successfully piloted in Regions 5 and 6 with a focus on coordinating service referrals for a suite of parenting services that includes Intensive Family Preservation (IFP), Reunification and Therapeutic Family Time (RTFT), Parent Support Services (PSS) and Child First.

Furthermore, the long awaited automated Universal Referral Form (URF) is now available for statewide use. The CT-KIND Team, Central Office Divisions and Regional URF Form Pilot Team have worked with Staff around the state to create a URF tool to improve the efficiency of the referral making process, while simultaneously gathering data to inform agency knowledge about services and utilization trends.

Each Region has a designated team of Champions who will provide support and guidance as the URF is rolled out.

To support the ESC work, the following social workers have been promoted to serve as Regional Enhanced Service Coordinators:

- Region 1 Jill Kochman
- Region 2 Josh Fisher
- Region 3 Kathy Payne
- Region 4 Omar Muhammad
- Region 5 Megan Bracone
- Region 6 Kathleen Costello

This team will be directly reporting to Temple Figueroa, the Statewide Supervisor for Enhanced Service Coordination, and with additional support in each Region from the Systems Program Directors.

What is Integrated Family Care and Support?

The Department of Children and Families has established a new program leading to the empowerment and strengthening of families - and the core values in our work we strive to achieve each day.

Integrated Family Care and Support (IFCS), engages families while connecting them to concrete, traditional and non-traditional resources in their community, including the full array of Department funded services.

Families eligible for the program will be those who are the subject of an investigation that is not substantiated and the children are determined to be safe, yet needs have been identified jointly with the family requiring in-home supports. Up until the launch of IFCS, these families would typically be transferred to ongoing DCF services and remained open as a child protective services case. With the family's participation, ongoing case management activities will now be provided by Beacon Health Options and the Department will close its case.

Each family will be assigned a Family Care and Support Coordinator (FCSC) who will assume responsibilities with the family including:

- Maintaining direct contact with the family
- Assembling and coordinating Family Team meetings
- Developing and completing the family's Plan of Care
- Administering the array of necessary assessments and/or surveys

Families will also have the opportunity to work with a Peer Specialist who will advocate and mentor them to take the lead in the development of their Plan of Care to be reviewed every two months. The North Carolina Family Assessment Scale for General Services (NCFAS-G) will be completed with the family to identify strengths and needs to help inform service delivery.

During the first five weeks, IFCS will have weekly visits with families and then every other week thereafter as well as regular phone contact.

The program is expected to last 6 to 9 months and is capable of being extended. A family satisfaction survey will be completed prior to discharge as one important method to evaluate the success of the program. The UCONN School of Social Work is also evaluating IFCS.

Implementation has commenced this week in Regions 4 and 5, and full statewide implementation will be completed by April 1st.

All families need partners in the community to help them raise children who are safe, happy and successful -- and that can happen without the Department continuing to be a presence in their lives. It is my belief that this program is an important development as we continue our work to strengthen families to raise resilient children who thrive.

We look forward to our partnerships leading to the success of supporting families to keep children safely at home!