DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities

Joette Katz
Commissioner

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Governor

Department of Children and Families Reform
Commissioner Joette Katz

THE SITUATION

Upon accepting the position of Department of Children and Families Commissioner effective January 2011, former-Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Joette Katz said:

- DCF needs to reduce the number of children in state care.
- For children whose safety requires state care:
  - DCF needs to place more of these children with a relative or other person the child knows.
  - DCF needs to reduce the number of children living in a group (congregate) setting.
  - DCF needs to reduce the number being served out of state.

THE REFORMS

Since January 2011, Commissioner Katz made the following changes:

- **Strengthening Families Practice Model**: Instituted to change the overall way DCF works with families. Families are viewed as the solution -- not the problem. All families have strengths and by listening and treating them with respect, the Department can help families build on their strengths and connect to community partners for the help they need.
- **Differential Response System (DRS)**: Lower risk families no longer are investigated for abuse or neglect. Instead, the Department conducts an assessment, and, after ensuring the child is safe, connects the family to a community agency that works with the family to find assistance identified by the family as most helpful. Family participation is voluntary. Nearly 40% of reports are diverted to this "family assessment response" track.
- **Relative And Kinship Care**: Commissioner Katz issued a directive to staff that relatives and kin (a person with an established relationship with the child) are the first placement option for children in care. Changes in licensing relatives/kin were instituted to remove barriers and added support services for these families are being instituted.

- **Child and Family Team Meetings**: The Department started a process of holding family meetings --including the immediate and extended family, the child, natural supports (friends, clergy, etc.) service providers and anyone else the family wishes -- to find solutions to challenges. The family works with Department staff to identify plans addressing the child's needs. These meetings have expanded over time to focus on moving children out of congregate placements, preventing removals, placing children with relatives or kin, and, beginning later this year, finding permanent connections.
- **Announced Visits**: Commissioner Katz directed staff to respond to reports by first making a phone call to the family to set up an appointment to go to the home -- unless safety concerns preclude this approach.
- **Commissioner Decision Required For Out Of State Placement**: To send a child out of state for services, staff must receive personal approval from the Commissioner based on a showing that no suitable service is available in state.

THE RESULTS

As of July 1, 2014 and compared to January 2011:

- There are **669 fewer children in care** -- a decrease of 14 percent;
- The percentage of **children in care who live with a relative** or someone else they know grew **from 21% in January 2011 to 34.4%;**
- The percentage of children in care who live in congregate (group) care dropped from **29.8% in January 2011 to 19%** -- **a reduction of 643 children or 45%**; and
- There are **339 fewer children in out of state care** -- a **decrease of 93.6 percent**. The number of children out of state stands at **23 as of 7/1/14 compared to 362** when the administration began.

Note on **Considered Removal Child and Family Team Meeting** (CR-CFTM): Effective February 11, 2013, Commissioner Katz directed the Department to hold a child and family team meeting when staff are considering the removal of a child. The meetings are to occur prior to the removal or, where that is not possible consistent with child safety, within 48 hours of the removal. Families are asked to invite anyone in their extended family or network of supports who might help resolve the underlying challenges. During the six-month period ending July 2, 2014, 1,328 children were the subject of a CR-CFTM, and 71 percent of the children received the meeting *prior* to removal. Seventy-nine (79) percent of the children were not removed. Of the children who were placed by DCF, 64 percent were placed with family or someone else they knew. Less than 10 percent of the children with a meeting prior to removal were placed into care with someone they did not know (non-relative foster home).