



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children



Connecticut Commission on Children Minutes of Meeting

Commission Conference Room
18-20 Trinity Street, Hartford, Connecticut

Tuesday, September 12, 2006
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Voting members present: Judith A. Busch, James P. Cordier, Dr. Alex Geertsma, Senator Mary Ann Handley, Alison Hilding, Josh Piteo, Laura Lee Simon, and John Yrchik.

Ex officio members (or designees) present: Department of Children and Families (Rudy Brooks), Office of Policy and Management (Anne Foley), Department of Social Services (Sylvia Gafford-Alexander), Department of Public Health (Norma Gyle), Chief Court Administrator (Judge Michael Mack), Department of Correction (Mary Marcial), Department of Mental Retardation (Commissioner Peter O'Meara), and Department of Education (Charlene Russell-Tucker).

Members absent: George Coleman, Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann, Mary Fox, Representative Michael Lawlor, Senator Christopher Murphy and Attorney General (Susan Pearlman), Mary Grace Reed, and Leslie Wolfgang.

Commission staff present: Elaine Zimmerman, Thomas Brooks, Elizabeth Brown, Patricia Estill, Kevin Flood, Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, Rachel Levy and Edie Luciano.

Handouts: Agenda; Minutes for June 13, 2006, Executive Board Meetings Schedule for 2006-2007, Commission Meetings Schedule for 2007, Children Eclipsed by Natural and Unnatural Disaster (artwork and writing from 9/11/2006), Husky A and B enrollment growth by month.

Meeting Convened

Chair James Cordier called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Chairman's Report

Chairman James Cordier said he'd like the meeting to focus on policy and legislative issues for the upcoming General Assembly session. He urged members to bring up issues important to them. He added that Commission members would soon receive a report on drug and alcohol addiction, showing states are behind in coordinating solutions to this problem. He thanked Alison Hilding for her help and persistence on this. He also noted that Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman has been appointed by the U.S. Attorney's office to a national committee on youth violence.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman reported that the Commission's forum on how children deal with terrorism and other disasters, held on the fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks and in partnership with the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, drew extensive news media coverage. She added that invitations for students to submit writing and artwork for a follow-up event early next year have been sent to schools throughout the state.

In addition, Ms. Zimmerman said, the Commission recently raised approximately \$1 million from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for research on successful reading programs in Hartford. With reading scores heading down, she said, the Commission will continue to watch the situation closely.

She also commended Director of Policy and Research Analysis Thomas R. Brooks for his recent work on child health initiatives, done in conjunction with the state departments of education and public health, along with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Discussion

Mr. Cordier opened the floor to Commission members who had suggestions for policy directions in the 2007 General Assembly session and for representatives of state agencies to report on their initiatives.

Josh Piteo asked whether it would be worthwhile to expand the scope of this year's school nutrition legislation, also known as "the soda bill." Mr. Brooks said it's unlikely the legislature will revisit the issue until after determining the level of participation by local boards of education in the current incentive program for school nutrition. He noted, though, that the Commission has partnered with the state Department of Public Health to form the Connecticut Childhood Obesity Council, which was scheduled to hold its first meeting on September 20, and with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities to create a radio public service announcement on the importance of physical activity. The ad will be narrated by several Connecticut mayors. Laura

Lee Simon reported that another important initiative in child health and nutrition is the upcoming opening of the “Healthyville” exhibit at the Stepping Stones Children’s Museum in Norwalk.

Legislative Director Elizabeth Brown reported that 15,000 children were “disenrolled” from the state’s HUSKY health insurance program. The governor has earmarked an additional \$1 million for outreach, and the legislature appears likely next year to address the causes of the problem, including rules changes and confusion over eligibility.

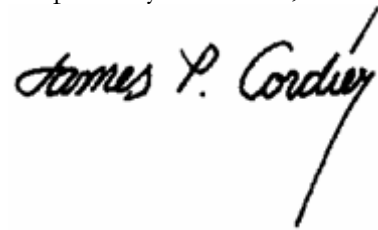
Ms. Brown also noted an interest by Senator Mary Ann Handley, as co-chair of the legislature’s Human Services Committee, in reviving the Discovery program, in which community colleges provide students who are parents with stipends to cover child-care costs. Ms. Simon said the Norwalk Housing Authority and Norwalk Community College have programs for parents that could serve as models for that initiative. Judith Busch said it’s important for grant recipients to understand they’re attending college for an education, not just stipends; it’s important for them to attend classes and do their homework or face loss of the stipends.

In a discussion on school bullying, John Yrchik noted that his organization, the Connecticut Education Association, polled its members on school discipline in general. The members rated a consistently enforced district policy as the most important element in successful school discipline, followed by strong support from administrators.

Closing

Mr. Cordier closed the meeting at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Cordier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends downwards and to the right.

James P. Cordier
Chair