



## QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSIONER NOMINEE

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### COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (CGS §§ [17A-5](#) AND [17A-6](#))

The commissioner is responsible for establishing facilities and services for children and families under the Department of Children and Families' (DCF's) care. These include child protective, foster care, and family services; juvenile justice services; substance abuse and related services; mental health services; and prevention and educational services.

### QUESTIONS FOR NOMINEE

1. Several proposed bills this session would increase independent oversight of DCF. As commissioner, what is your response to critics who say that your department needs such oversight?
2. There has been disagreement about the relative merits of two different quality assurance programs for the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS). CJTS is accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA), but DCF no longer implements the performance-based standards program offered by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Critics say the latter should be required because ACA standards apply mainly to the school's physical structure, and not the conditions of confinement there. How do you respond to this?
3. Some critics of the department say it has gone too far in shifting the placement of children from group homes to relative and kinship care, doing so without adequate support for the family members or plans in place for the children. What is your response?
4. In October 2014, DCF released the Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan, as required by PA [13-178](#). According to the plan:

*The current array of services is insufficient for meeting child and family behavioral health needs, as manifested in lack of knowledge about the service array, long waitlists for some services, and high emergency department utilization.*

Given the state's current fiscal crisis, in what ways will the department be able to work towards improving behavioral health services for children and families in the upcoming year?

5. According to a recent *Hartford Courant* article, in order to reduce preventable infant deaths, the department will increase oversight to families with infants that have open DCF cases, even if the infant has not been subject to abuse or neglect. In what ways will oversight increase? How will this increased oversight help to reduce infant deaths?
6. According to a July 2014 statement from the Office of the Child Advocate, during the previous three month period, records revealed over 200 incidents where staff at CJTS and Pueblo, the locked girls' facility, used physical or mechanical restraints to control youth. For what reasons are such restraints used? Has the use of restraints decreased since last July and if not, why are these practices still used with such frequency?
7. In the most recent *Juan F.* consent decree report, the court monitor noted "the Department's tremendous efforts in addressing human trafficking." Can you describe those efforts in more detail? What additional steps would you like to take to address this issue?
8. The *Juan F.* report also cited problems, including a "lack of sufficient hiring by the state after a prolonged spike in reports and active cases." The report noted that 116 staff members carried a caseload that exceeded the maximum limit. Given the state's current budget outlook, what steps, if any, do you plan to take to ease the burden on staff while still delivering vital services to department-involved children and families?
9. What are your legislative priorities for the 2015 session? How are those different from last session?
10. What do you see as DCF's strengths and weaknesses? What actions would you like to take during your second term to maximize those strengths and reduce the weaknesses?

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