STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Testimony of
Commissioner Joette Katz

Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2017

Good morning Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Joette Katz and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). With me today are various Department staff who are here to assist me in answering questions that members of the committee may have.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding the Governor's proposed biennial budget for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 for the Department of Children and Families.

The department's mission and mandates include: child protection and family services; children's behavioral health; prevention; educational services; and juvenile justice. At any point in time, DCF serves approximately 26,000 children and 11,500 families across its programs and service array. On any given day, there are approximately 14,700 open cases as well as 2,500 investigations and 2,000 family assessments underway. Last year, the DCF Careline received 109,186 calls, 52,417 of which were reports of child abuse or neglect, of which 30,663 reports were accepted and assigned to either an investigative track or family assessment response track. Calls to Careline have increased by 20% since 2015 (90,942 calls) in large part due to enhanced mandated reporting laws that broadening the pool of mandated reporters and increased the penalties for failures or delays in reporting. I credit these enhancements to you and other members of the General Assembly.

Our Progress

The Governor's proposed budget for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 builds upon the many improvements the department has made since January 1, 2011. Utilizing evidenced based practices and services that have been evaluated as providing the best outcomes for children and families, these changes have resulted in:

- 441 fewer children in care -- a decrease of 9.2%;
- Growth in the percentage of children in care who live with a relative or someone else they know from 21% in 41.7%;
- A decrease in the percentage of children in care who live in congregate (group) care from 29.8% to 11.2% -- a reduction of 938 children or 65.9%; and
- 358 fewer children in out of state care -- a decrease of 98.9%. The number stood at 4 as of January 1, 2017, compared to 362 when the administration began.

These are dramatic improvements, achieved through policy and practice shifts that place Connecticut on the forefront of national best practice. I would like to highlight some of these initiatives.

The Strengthening Families Practice Model, focused on engaging families to participate in their case planning, has better enabled us to make such tremendous progress by avoiding the need for

placing children into the foster care system, or limiting their stays to shorter periods of time so we can return children to their families with plans to mitigate safety concerns and provide needed supports to parents.

Our differential response system, which we call "Family Assessment Response" (FAR), has better positioned our agency, following a formal assessment ensuring child safety, to meet the needs of many of our families in normative community-based settings without formal child welfare involvement. FAR provides an alternative response by establishing a track for low-risk families whose children are safe, but who may need access to basic services in the community. In 2016, approximately 42% of the referrals to DCF were diverted to our FAR track, resulting in families feeling respected and staff feeling more satisfied because they are able to help families become self-reliant.

Working in tandem with many of our providers, who shifted their service delivery from the most expensive residential care to evidence based community services for a fraction of the cost, we serve many more children in their homes and communities; and when children must be removed from their parents, they now predominantly go into family settings, which allows them to achieve permanency sooner.

Connecticut continues to make significant progress in implementation of the statewide Children's Behavioral Health Plan, with more than 100 activities underway across seven state agencies. Of note are:

- Establishment of an Advisory Board with three key areas of focus - financial mapping, network analysis and data integration;
- Implementation of Connecticut's first Care Management Entity;
- Issuance of the Connecticut Youth Suicide Prevention Plan;
- Statewide expansion of crisis stabilization/crisis respite resources;
- Expansion of Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) and the completion of over one hundred thirty (130) Memoranda of Agreement between Local Education Agencies and EMPS teams;
- Expansion of Modular Approach to Therapy for Children (MATCH) to six additional clinics
- Implementation of Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) in thirteen school districts with over ninety (90) school based clinicians;
- Implementation of Adolescent Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral for Treatment (SBIRT);
- Establishment of an Autism Spectrum Disorder Unit at the Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership;
- Continued investment in training around infant mental health and implementation of the Circle of Security parenting program.

A study conducted by DCF's Office of Research and Evaluation prompted practice improvements and reforms, including the development and implementation of an Early Childhood Practice Guide highlighting best practices to address and mitigate safety and risk factors for families with children under age three. In addition, the department deployed a "Rapid Safety Feedback" (RSF) system to identify families who require more oversight and services in partnership with the Eckerd Foundation, a well-known provider of social services that pioneered the RSF system. Qualitative reviews and predictive analytics are used to identify child welfare-involved families who are at

greater risk for a child fatality. Families with the highest risk factors receive additional social worker visits, more comprehensive assessment of parental needs and greater services to meet those needs.

We also benefit from partnerships with leading institutions and agencies who are actively involved in evaluation activities, such as the Injury Prevention Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Child Health and Development Institute, Beacon Health Options and the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Finally, the department has set out clear expectations around the adoption and use of the results based accountability framework, the use of a Provider Information Exchange (PIE) database to assure reliable and timely data entry relative to service provision and quarterly reviews of all service types.

Proposed 2018-2019 Biennial Budget

The Governor's budget adds $14,463,978 to enhance support of community-based child welfare and behavioral health services for which the need for either greater capacity or geographic availability has been identified. Service types include, but are not limited to: Family Support Services, Differential Response System, Day Treatment Centers, Child First, Multi-Systemic Therapy for Transition-Aged Youth (MST-TAY), Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS), Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in School (CBITS) and Intensive Family Preservation (IFP).

A second baseline adjustment provides funding for child daycare services, in the amounts of $3,375,821 in FY 2018 and $3,985,376 in FY 2019, for children in foster care and other in-home settings. This adjustment is needed because the Care-4-Kids program ceased new enrollment of children from what is known as priority group 4, effective August 1, 2016. Starting this fiscal year, DCF will pay for daycare services on behalf of new children coming under the agency's oversight.

A transfer of $2,329,087 from the DCF budget to the Department of Housing (DOH) is made to realign the Homeless Youth Program. This transfer will not result in eliminated or reduced services. The proposed budget simply recognizes DOH as the successor department to DCF with respect to the homeless youth program, as required by Section 419 of Public Act 15-5 (June Special Session).

The last baseline adjustment demonstrates how changes in the DCF service array have impacted the budget. A reduction is made under accounts that fund congregate care placements and services to families referred due to poverty related issues who are being served through the Family Assessment Response program. Increased funding is recommended under accounts that support adoptive and foster families due to projected growth in the number of children in placement. When combined, these adjustments result in a net decrease of just under $2 million in FY 2018 and an increase in FY 2019 of $238,841. In addition, the department will reduce excess contracted bed capacity with the closure of two short-term assessment and respite (STAR) homes.

The proposed budget also includes funding reductions of approximately $0.78 million in FY 2018 and $0.55 million in FY 2019 in the area of Juvenile Justice. In part, this relates to rightsizing DCF staffing levels. The juvenile justice population served by the department continues to decrease and we are confident we can accommodate the proposed reduction in social work staffing without negatively impacting caseload levels. Additionally, the budget reflects the anticipated delayed implementation of a new juvenile justice outreach program, specifically a reading program.

A reduction of $580,826 is proposed in each of FY 2018 and FY 2019 to reflect the continuation of allocated bottom-line lapses contained in Public Act 16-2 (May Special Session). A further reduction of $93,995 is proposed under the Community KidCare account in recognition of the sunsetting of the 'CTparenting.com' website and to adjust for unobligated funds. DCF has maintained the CTparenting.com website with support from the Department of Public Health. However, in recent years the website was not being accessed widely and we are folding most of its content into the websites of both DCF and the Office of Early Childhood.

In addition, there are two proposed changes in the Governor's budget that neither reduce nor increase the overall state budget. The first is to re-align Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funding that has for many years been transferred to DCF by the Department of Social Services for private residential treatment services. Going forward, this funding ($2,407,211 in FY 2018 and $3,209,314 in FY 2019) will instead be appropriated under DCF's budget, thus streamlining the administrative activities related to these dollars. The second is the reallocation of $582,348 in each fiscal year from the Child Welfare Support Services account to the Board and Care for Children - Foster account to more accurately align dollars for community based life skills services with a recent change in programming.

Juan F. Update

Following the legislative rejection of the modified *Juan F.* Exit Plan agreement on February 1, 2017, the plaintiffs immediately filed notice in the U.S. District Court of actual and likely noncompliance with the existing *Juan F.* exit plan. Last Friday, we appeared before Judge Stefan Underhill and he requested that the parties reconvene and deliberate over a period of twenty days. The Court's expectation is that we will meet with the plaintiffs and the Court Monitor, and provide a progress report to the Judge on or about March 1st. While it is the Judge's preferred goal for the parties to reach an agreement on the revised Exit Plan, he did recognize that it may be necessary for the federal court to order compliance. We will continue to provide progress updates to legislative leadership as this process moves forward.

Conclusion

In summary, the Governor's budget offers the department the opportunity to provide the services that are most needed by the State's children and families. We believe this budget enables the Department to meet its statutory mandates as well as allow us to make significant progress in meeting the current *Juan F.* Exit Plan outcome measures.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak about the DCF budget and for your continued support in serving the Connecticut's children and families. My staff and I welcome the opportunity to address your questions both today and when we meet in subcommittee.