REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): We are hereby calling the meeting of the public hearing of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. We have before us three House resolutions and two Senate resolutions. The first resolution before us is commissioner designee, Melissa McCaw, of Middletown is being considered for confirmation for the full-time job to be secretary of the office of Policy and Management. Is Melissa with us this morning? Before you take a seat, Melissa, will you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth? You may be seated. It is customary at these hearings that we allow the -- the nominee the floor to make an initial presentation, but before that, I would like the clerk to -- to read the safety procedures.

CLERK: In the interest of safety, I would ask you to note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors through which you entered the room are emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go to your right and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit
Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee Public Hearing

February 5, 2019

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

signs to one of the other exits. Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions from the Capitol police. Do not delay and do not return unless you are advised that it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown, announcement -- a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors, and seek concealment behind desks and chairs until an all clear announcement is heard.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Madam Clerk. And now Melissa McCaw may proceed.

MELISSA MCCAW: Good morning, Senator Duff, Representative Phipps, Representative Duff in his absence, Senator Fasano in his absence, Representative Perillo, and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Melissa McCaw, and I am extremely excited to be here today as Governor Lamont’s nominee for Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management. This state, my home state, is truly a great place. We have abundant diversity and an exceptional workforce fed by many of our great schools pushing the boundaries in aerospace, bioscience, insurance and finance, and developing advanced manufacturing base to build on. Our economy is simultaneously fueled by small businesses trying to grow and 17 fortune 500 companies trying to stay on top. We balance our suburbs with dynamic urban centers looking to rebound. In the past year, Yale celebrated having winners of the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes. I am absolutely unapologetic about my love for this state and the promise that it holds.

However, this is not to say that we are free from problems that need attention both now and into the future. Our two main pension systems suffer from
decades of underfunding. Our economic recovery from the great depression -- recession has been slow, and we simply have not replaced some of the high-paying jobs that were lost. Our transportation infrastructure is crumbling and outmoded causing traffic to halt on some of our main arterial highways and putting the state at an economic disadvantage.

We have experienced state budget uncertainty as our growing fixed cost paired with revenues that cannot keep pace have forced spending cuts and revenue increases. Connecticut is a great state with all of the potential to become even better, but we need to tackle these challenges while maintaining those assets that make our state so wonderful. This is going to require a new approach, one where we will not simply focus on the near term and create instability in the future. We will need to make the difficult choices together, taking care of the present but with a keen understanding on how those decisions will impact the next decade, not only the next year or the next biennium. We will need to be comprehensive in our approach, inquisitive about new ideas, bipartisan focused, and willing to acknowledge that stinging remarks in the media to win the day will result in more problems than solutions.

Our residents, our businesses, and stakeholders are depending on a new type of leadership where we jointly rise to the occasion. Today, I stand in partnership with you to do just that. Based on what I have accomplished over 2 decades working on budgets, finances, and operations, where I have been, what I can do, and how I will do it, I believe I am the right person to lead the office of Policy and Management. Immediately, after finishing my
undergraduate degree at Wesleyan, I spent the next 8 years learning state government from a budget operations and policy perspective and working hard to craft new skills and forge trusting and enduring relationships as a budget analyst at OPM. Over my 7 years at OPM, I was the analyst for over 20 state agencies. I then moved to the University of Hartford where I served as the university budget director at a time when the school was experiencing financial struggles with declining enrollment and an increasing discount rate, but over these 7 years that I was there, we helped correct the downward trajectory through short-term reductions and longer term strategic initiative of strengthening and reforming our financial model, making the difficult choices, as well as the strategic investments. These choices included implementing reductions and deficiencies and maximizing use of our assets, human capital and IT infrastructure. We used data to informed decision making, evaluate outcomes, build accountability with integrated faculty and staff taskforces, breaking down the silos, and paving a pathway to build buy-in and a framework for change.

While serving as budget director at U-Hart and full-time mother to my 3 children, I also earned a Master’s in Public Administration from our very own University of Connecticut. Three years ago, Mayor Luke Bronin asked me to serve as the City of Hartford’s Director of Budget Management and Grants, and thereafter, promoted me to Chief Financial Officer about 2 years later. In this role, I oversaw the Department of Management, Budget, and Grants, the Finance Department including Budget and Revenue Management, Grants, Accounting, Payroll, Accounts Payable, Tax Collection, Risk Management, encompassing a staff in excess of 65 employees.
When called upon by Mayor Bronin, I could not resist the call to return to public service. You will learn that I tend to be drawn to a good challenge. Hartford’s finances were in trouble and our capital city was hanging on by a fiscal thread. The financial condition of the city of Hartford required immediate action, and I was up to this challenge. I began in January 2016, as I would call it, getting under the hood and quantifying the extent of the structural issues, tracing to their roots and major drivers, identifying immediate short-term and long-term cost-saving measures. Within the first 5 months, we closed a gap that represented about 8.5 percent of the general fund budget that year. This included significant department reductions, restructure, service modifications, eliminating 15 percent of nonuniform personnel. We continued that work in the year thereafter. I developed the city’s municipal recovery plan, which contained a combination of reductions, labor savings, and a contract assistance agreement with the state of Connecticut that jointly forged a path for fiscal sustainability to stave off potential default or bankruptcy.

I have firsthand experience, the day-in and day-out accountability that comes with a municipality under MARB’s purview. Under Mayor Bronin’s and my leadership, Hartford rose to the occasion each and every time to demonstrate that our fiscal house was now in order and being maintained. I am especially proud of the work that I did in Hartford as the city’s credibility was restored and internal accountability was strengthened. You can ask each and every member of the MARB board, and they can attest to the work that I did in Hartford. But that is not to say that the work is done. The city is
moving in the right direction. It’s evident that the significant effort, the reductions, the new and negotiated contracts, the policies and fiscal discipline that we put in place have provided stability and elevated the caliber and expectations for fiscal due diligence. It is now time to transition from stability to growth to ensure that our capital city and our urban centers thrive. I know firsthand the struggles that urban centers face. I have lived it firsthand and I have led through change and tough decisions. This firsthand experience will inform my work as the co-chair of the Municipal Accountability Review Board, an area in which I will focus to help turn our financially trouble cities around.

Let me say up front there is no one-size-fits-all solution to a respected municipality’s financial challenges, but I come armed with a strong understanding of the levers that a municipality can avail itself of to right the ship and redirect its course, and so with this 20 years of experience that I have described and as further detailed in my testimony, I am before you as Governor Lamont’s nominee to be the next OPM Secretary. We face the headwinds, the projected multibillion-dollar shortfalls well beyond the current biennium, ballooning fixed costs in the ire of a potential looming recession. I’ve been in the trenches, I’ve been on the frontlines, and I am confident that with almost 2 decades of experience this administration with me at the helm as OPM Secretary can work with the General Assembly to craft long-term solutions to the state’s budget that will stabilize our finances and facilitate economic growth by giving our residents, businesses, and organizations the confidence they need to stay and invest. It makes
me enormously proud to say that I was born here, I grew up here, I went to school here, and I started my career and family here.

I started my career in public service for the state because I wanted to do my small part to improve this place that I love, and I return to OPM with the same ambition. With that, I humbly request your support of my nomination so we can prove to everyone that Connecticut’s best is still yet to come. Thank you for your time, and I’m happy to answer any questions.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you for the introductory statement. I’ve had firsthand knowledge of the work you’ve done in the city of Hartford, and you know, there’s a misperception out there that Hartford causes its own problems, but I know better than that. I know that the problems are structural, and that Hartford has done an amazing job under a very difficult situation, and thank you for all your help, and I’m very happy to see you know in your new role.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Hopefully, you will be confirmed. And at this point I will ask my fellow committee members if there is any questions they would like to ask of you. Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Thank you and congratulations on your appointment. We will see how you feel as we get into this budget --

MELISSA MCCAW: [Laughing].

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Whether you’re thankful for it, but just a couple questions I want to ask you about. When Hartford -- when the bailout situation
was being talked about, one of the things that Mayor Bronin talked about was switching from a defined benefit to a contribution plan, and I think that was discussed in the bailout. Then, there was a reversal as I understand it from the council. What was your role, if any, or what -- what is your viewpoints on that?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. Thank you for your -- your kind remarks. So, one of the options that the administration was researching was looking into a defined contribution plan, particularly for our nonunion employees, the majority of which are appointed positions, really from the context of providing greater portability. Within the city council, for a time period, there were some struggles on the philosophical position as to whether or not council supported more so of a defined benefit plan versus a defined contribution plan, and so that work is still ongoing. Over, you know, the past 6 months, I think we were able to help council get to a place of being more open-minded. The treasurer was looking into -- for such a small pool -- what would the cost of administering that plan be and then evaluating comprehensively what the cost would be to that small group of employees to determine if it was a viable option, so it is still an open item for consideration to my understanding, but the administration and the council are still pursuing.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And what did you find -- did you find to be a detriment or a benefit to the city of Hartford to move into a defined -- to a contribution plan as opposed to defined benefit plan?

MELISSA MCCAW: The work --
SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Long term.

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. The work was not completed before I separated from the city of Hartford. There was an RFP that was out that the treasurer was awaiting response on, so I was not able to draw a conclusion.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And with respect to the Hartford public school system, my understanding there are some employees that their spouse or something like that was getting -- were getting I think it was -- correct me if I’m wrong -- healthcare benefits -- healthcare benefits that should not had been getting healthcare benefits. Do you deal with the education side as well or is that like a totally separate thing from you?

MELISSA MCCAW: So, you know, I support the education side in terms of arbitration or union negotiations with respect to the city’s overall financial ability to pay. I’m not aware of the situation that you’re describing. We did work with the Board of Ed to evaluate the healthcare plan that they were offering to their employees as compared to what we were offering city employees on the municipal side of the house, and so they are looking to model their plan after, you know, like the high-deductible health plan that we implemented, but as far as any specific benefits relative to spouses, I am not aware of that issue.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Did you -- when you say not aware, not aware when you were employed or not aware just generally as you sit here now?

MELISSA MCCAW: In general.
SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Okay. There were some articles in the paper. You didn’t --

MELISSA MCCAW: No.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Okay. On the Hartford bailout situation that you were mentioning, and I was supportive of the Hartford bailout as proposed by the legislature. There was some under among leaders on both sides of the aisle that what was actually implemented was not -- and signed between the governor and Hartford -- was not the deal that the legislature proposed. In other words, the legislature proposed a short-term deal. The governor made it 20 years. There were some other changes and all the leaders in this building stood up together and said that wasn’t the deal. There was a sort of fix to it that the governor vetoed. I wanted to know whether or not your impression was -- if you know -- that do you believe that the deal that was with Hartford and the state relative to the bailout was something this legislature passed or something that was given more latitude by virtue of Governor Malloy? If you have an opinion?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. Well, you know the first thing I would say is I was not a part of the -- let me restate that. You know, the governor -- prior governor’s administration obviously sought their own legal opinion as to what the -- the legislation that was passed allowed. I was not a part of that conversation, and so therefore, I cannot opine. I also was not a part of the behind-the-scenes negotiations about ultimately the legislature passed, so I don’t think it would be prudent for me to opine on what the intent was versus what was actually implemented.
SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Okay. That’s a fair answer. I want to turn, if I can, to the hospitals. There’s been a large talk about obviously that’s going to have a large impact on our budget. There’s something I became aware of by virtue of the hospitals bringing it to my attention called the grouper, which is not a fish, but --

MELISSA MCCAW: [Laughing].

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Apparently, is some -- it’s some calculation that DSS did, and I can’t technically describe it, but my understanding is that when it happened there was a shortfall of 26 percent of the money to hospitals, and that when it came to DSS’ attention they indicated that wasn’t the intent of doing this grouper thing, but that they recognize it and that the hospitals will be made whole. In other words, the payments would -- would not be any different. So, it’s my understanding that that issue was still outstanding. Are you under the same understanding that that issue was still outstanding?

MELISSA MCCAW: So, you probably will remember the history that in January 2015 DSS transitioned from an interim per diem rate to what they call the APR diagnosis related group payment system, and based on our agreement with CMS, this is the methodology under which we currently reimburse or prorate the supplemental payments. There have been a -- until -- essentially, the payments that have been provided to date correspond with our agreement with CMS. There are ongoing conversations with -- with DSS to evaluate the potential resolution as well as conversations within the office of the governor. It is still an open item, and so I expect that we will
continue to have conversations about this through the legislative session.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): In translation, is it fair to say there’s no one immediate -- there’s not an immediate fix to this problem for the hospitals?

MELISSA MCCAW: I think that remains to be determined. You know, the hospital conversation is far more complex than the grouper in isolation. You will recall that there is litigation. There are, you know, rate -- there’s a rate matter that’s being, you know, reviewed through the DSS hearing officer process, and we would like to have a more comprehensive conversation about these items. The grouper will be one element of that.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): But you see that kind of strikes me as a little beyond fair.

MELISSA MCCAW: Uh-huh.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): If I make a deal with you -- you being the state, not personally, obviously.

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure.

SENATOR FASANO: If I make a deal with you that you’re gonna pay me A, B, and C, and then I find out I’m not being paid -- I’m getting 26 percent less for my Medicaid. This is a population we need to serve. And I’m getting less money and I go up to DSS, and part of you as a state, and say, Hey, what gives? And they say, hey, listen. Don’t worry about it. It was a mistake. It’s not supposed to give you less, and now, it’s being held as part of a global satisfaction of other outstanding issues that are unrelated to the grouper, unrelated to the deal we had, but now, we’re gonna put it all together. Do you understand how that could be deemed as the
state squeezing for economic purposes for another issue unrelated to the issue that’s before you?

MELISSA MCCAW: So -- so let me -- let me restate to make sure that you understand me clearly. The administration has been in office for less than 30 days. We have been making ourselves have a better understanding of the comprehensive issues surrounding the hospitals. We’ve been meeting 2-3 times per week to lay out an approach or how we would seek resolution. There has been no final decision on whether or not there will be a comprehensive solution or a piecemeal for lack of a better term. I think what I would want to say to you today is to reassure you that it is something that is on the top of our priority list and conversations are ongoing.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And while I appreciate that answer, let me say this. If 26 percent of my revenue was held hostage and the only issue for me to get my 26 percent is an affirmative response that I’m relying upon that I’m gonna get this money from DSS -- now, see affirmative response DSS gave, I am going to give you this money, it was not meant to short-change you, especially on the Medicaid population. Mea culpa, and I rest on that. I’ve done contracts, I’ve done expenses predicated upon that income. Why is that not looked alone as an isolation, which is we made this promise, we should keep this promise, forget about everything else. All that other stuff is stuff that went on for years in this building. We all know that. Medicaid rates that they’ve been arguing about in the lawsuits. That has nothing to do with the agreed upon medical rate -- Medicaid rates that DSS is supposed to pay. That isn’t the dispute. The dispute is not how much to pay. Dispute is why wasn’t it paid. It wasn’t
supposed to change that figure and it did, so I just perceive that as being sort of unfair by the state to hold onto this money unless all these other issues are brought in, and I -- I think that this should be resolved in isolation because it was a promise made by the state that folks rely upon, employees of those corporations rely upon, so I -- I hope that you take a look at it and send back the message to the administration. This should not be used as a hostage for other issues unrelated to this issue, which is a one-on-one understanding.

The other thing is the small hospital pool. The payment was made in July after the fiscal year ended. The payment was made on -- as I understand it. And then in December the former OPM secretary, Ben Barnes said, you know what, we shouldn’t have made that payment because the hospital -- Hungerford I think it is?

MELISSA MCCAW: Yeah.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Right? Jumped out of the small hospital pool, and although it clearly was talked about in this building that that money would be reallocated to the other small hospitals, apparently -- and the we -- the legislature wasn’t part of this but I know that there was a plan filed that said that wasn’t gonna happen, but I think almost to a person in this legislature believe that -- that Hungerford dropping out, that small hospital pool money was going to be a spread out -- if I may -- among the other folks in the small hospital.

[Background noise] I don’t know why this thing’s talking to me. The other hospitals. I guess what I’m saying is if the money’s held up in December and this grouper money is held up now, this is a tremendous hit on our healthcare system, which is
fragile and which has to still do its job to the best it can, and I’m wondering if in the conversations, the administration or you have thought about the collative impact of both of those monies being withheld. Because there is a resolution. You -- you’re making more small hospital payments. You could make it and figure it out later, but right now, there’s a strangle hold, and I’m just curious what your thoughts were on that?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. Currently, the attorneys are reviewing the language with respect to the small hospital pool. I get it’s one of the items that we’re considering and that we’re continuing to have meetings on. Happy to work with you, Senator Fasano, and any other leadership as we come up with a -- a final resolution of all of these matters.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And I’ll be more than happy to go to any meeting at any place, anytime, anywhere because I think it is critical that we have to reset the board without a doubt. Governor Malloy and the hospitals and Ben Barnes did not get along without a doubt. When asked, I believe of Ben Barnes, why are you taking money from the hospitals? His answer was why do people rob banks? ‘Cause that’s where the money is. I found that a very unfortunate statement, but I think the point is that if we want healthcare to work in this state and we want all populations to be served to the best of the capability of this state, then I think the state has a strong incentive to solve as many problems as quickly as one can and using finances as a way to achieve that end just doesn’t seem prudent to me. So, what with these cases -- if you know -- ‘cause I know you’re OPM and not a lawyer -- but what are the
status of the cases? Do you have any understanding of that?

MELISSA MCCAW: Well, first of all, I want to respond with respect to the relationship that you described with the hospitals under the Pride administration. The Lamont administration is taking this as an opportunity to kick off a fresh start. I’ve had spent -- I’ve spent some time with the Connecticut Hospitals’ Association, one bringing the team in so that they can understand the state’s perspective as well as to hear the hospital’s perspective. Again, it’s a good faith measure to start a -- a different tone in that relationship, so I just wanted to make sure that you are very clear that it is not the intent of this administration to continue along that path. I am not going to go into the details on the litigation and the rate appeal matter and the grouper and the small hospitals pool because they are complex issues, and I -- we would not do it proper justice in this room, but I do want to just again reiterate to you that it is our goal to identify a potential resolution that we will work on with the legislature, and we will be having that conversation very soon on February 20, when you see the details of the governor’s budget, and I expect that our work on these issues will continue through the end of session. No decisions have been finalized with respect to the grouper or the small hospital pools, so I don’t want you to walk away with the wrong impression, but what -- the impression I want you to walk away with is it is a critical area of focus for the administration and a considerable amount of time is being spent on this issue, and so I believe we will have plenty of opportunities to continue this conversation, and certainly, if you’re interested in playing a larger
role in that, I am happy to make sure that that occurs.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): So, let me say a couple of things. First of all, I appreciate the fact, and this should be a fresh start. We do have a fresh start -- start. You have to have good faith, and when the grouper payment is held up and is 26 percent and we’re not just looking at the grouper payment, and that was a deal; why would participants to another deal rely upon the good faith nature of that party if that party isn’t taking the grouper, which was promised, and saying let’s hold to our word? We’re not the old administration.

MELISSA MCCAW: And no one is saying that that’s not a potential resolution, but there are other material components to this conversation that are appropriate for another setting that I think you should understand. So again, the administration has not made a decision on the grouper, the final resolution has not been determined, but we will keep legislative leadership as a part of the conversation and welcome you in that dialogue.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): So, what are those other things that are pertinent to the grouper?

MELISSA MCCAW: Look, we have $2.5-billion-dollars of liability with litigation. The Hospital Association is interested in -- in having a more comprehensive dialogue about what resolution could be. In the spirit of good faith, new relationship, we’re going to continue to have those conversations with them and shape what a potential resolution could look like. It is my understanding they’d like to continue talking and the administration would like to continue doing so as well.
SENATOR FASANO (34TH): And -- and that’s where I guess we -- I may have a different viewpoint, which is the other issues is the other litigation, which is my point. If the litigation started whenever litigation happened, the grouper issue comes up, DSS says, nope, we’re gonna pay you the money, it was not meant to reduce the amount of funds to you -- and I don’t think -- and if you disagree with that notion, please let me know -- but DSS said, listen. It wasn’t meant to give you less. We’re gonna give you the money. They’re waiting for the money, and now, there’s a change in administration and they say, we’re different than Malloy’s administration, except let me tell you what we’re gonna do. We’re not gonna give you the 26 percent until we talk about this other litigation, and you only have to think back 15 months when Governor Malloy said, we’re not gonna give you hospital pool money unless you do A, B, and C -- the small hospital pool money, and we’re not gonna give you the federal money -- going back 24 months, we’re not gonna give you the federal money that we got because you’re not playing ball over here. See, that doesn’t strike as a good record.

MELISSA MCCAW: Decision has not been made on the matter. You’re drawing a conclusion on what the administration’s ultimate position will be, and it has not yet been finalized.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): The only conclusion I’m drawing -- and I don’t want to be argumentative --

MELISSA MCCAW: As of this point in time, sure.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): The only conclusion I’m drawing is that the lack of giving the money is a conclusion in and of itself. That’s the only conclusion. There is no other reason not to give
the money but to say that we want to talk about these other lawsuits. And although you may want to make a run at it, and I think that I can understand that. Being a lawyer, I certainly can understand that, but then you risk the good faith that a fresh start is what we need in this building, and that bridge to a fresh start I would argue has fractures in it when you start with the first thing out of the box -- this grouper thing, and you got the small hospital pool money. That’s the only argument I’d like to make on that. I thank you for your answers, and I appreciate it, and I -- I will be involved as I can, and reach out to the administration as you as well, but thank you so much and congratulations on your nomination.

MELISSA MCCAW: You’re welcome. Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yes, ranking member, Perillo, and then representative Yaccarino.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I do have some questions. Actually, a lot of them actually could have been answered had we had a chance to meet prior to this. Many of the commissioners took that opportunity and it’s unfortunate you did not. You are uniquely qualified in that you are come from a budget background in a government that might actually be worse off than the state of Connecticut. You mentioned some of the things that you were able to accomplish in Hartford, many of them short-term, which is great. They have -- they have to be done, but because you have so much experience in Hartford, what is some of the long-term changes that a city
like Hartford needs to pursue in order to -- to not be in a situation where they need to be bailed out?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. So, a couple of things. Number one, economic development and growth is critical to meeting the plans that are imbedded in the recovery plan. I think the administration is -- is doing a decent job at inventorying parcels of land that can be redeveloped. They brought in a new essentially Economic and Development director that is very experienced, that understands that engaging the developers at not only a local but also a national level, basically being at the table when decisions are being made and opportunities for investment and making sure that Hartford is being considered. And so, I’d say that, you know, the economic development is absolutely critical. You know from a marketing perspective, you know, the city has to make sure that Hartford is a place that folks want to live and feel like they’re safe, a place where -- where families are comfortable with the educational system, and so from a public safety perspective, that’s an area they need to continue to focus on, and certainly, the extent in which they can move the lever in a sense on the educational system I think are key elements for their long-term success.

You know, just from a strictly financial perspective, to avoid Hartford being in the situation that it -- that we inherited when the Bronin administration came in -- again, I think the discipline that is imbedded in that contract assistance agreement; for example, there are triggers. If the city were to have a deficiency or a deficit in any year or if they were to have accumulative fund balance deficit, there is accountability that’s built in and there is rigor
that is now required in terms of how they manage that budget and the commitments that they make in the long term, so you know, from an economic development perspective, I think the focus is in the right place and in terms of making sure that the internal controls and you know, the financial due diligence that is required, whether you are a municipality or a business, making sure that you’re not overcommitting yourself in a sense, those provisions are also in place as well.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. After you mentioned marketing and perception, which I think is kind of important. It actually translates very well here in the state of Connecticut. We’ve heard some proposals early on in this legislative session having to do with business, namely family medical leave, an increase in the minimum wage. There’s been talk of obviously tolls and taxes. From a pure marketing perspective, what are your thoughts about those proposals and how they translate to marketing Connecticut to businesses?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. So, from a minimum wage perspective, you know, obviously, we would endeavor to have Connecticut be a place where the living wage allows the average, you know, mom, dad, you know, raising a family to be able to live and survive. I think it’s important that we never lose sight of the struggle of, you know, the lower income families in this -- in the state of Connecticut, and so certainly, if we are able to implement some of the proposals surrounding minimum wage, I think we’re saying that Connecticut is a place where we want you to be able to have a decent life, right? With quality of life. That should be a part of our -- our marketing message as well, and so I do think
that that’s important and the administration is continuing to consider that proposal.

From a paid family medical leave perspective, you know, I’m a mom, so I -- I know what it was like as an educated mom to try to figure out how I’m going to make ends meet when I’m taking care of a newborn child. That’s a struggle, right, for someone who is educated and makes a decent living, and so if you think about the low-income, you know, family member, you know, providing -- providing that benefit, again, says something about what our values are here in Connecticut. I think that’s also part of, you know, the messaging of why should you live here? Why do you want to invest? Why do you want to, you know, have a family here and put down some roots? So, you know, when we think about Connecticut being, you know, it’s best days are ahead, we need to be thinking about those values and the values that we represent, and of course, with that comes the financial affordability of those proposals. You know, I’ve been talking with legislative leadership about some of these ideas and folks are asking; and so, are we going to make sure that the fiscal note that goes along with that is incorporated? Well, we do comprehensively need to take both into consideration.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, and I -- I -- I’m sure that -- I know that everyone in this building is concerned about a family’s ability to survive and making this an affordable place. I have a question though. How does that jive with the administration’s proposed 2 percent tax on groceries?

MELISSA MCCAW: The administration has not put forth a budget, so there is no proposed tax on food that
we’ve formalized. As you know, Governor Lamont took a very different approach when he was coming into office. You know, he had a number of transition teams and you know, policy-type teams where he brought stakeholders to the table and asked for every idea, give me a -- and no idea is a bad idea. You’re aware that there is a sales tax study that was recently done, and so you know every idea is currently being considered. We have not locked in the final decision. His package will reflect his values on February 20.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, and I can appreciate that. But then how would a 2 percent or any percentage tax on groceries; how would that -- in your opinion -- impact mid-wage-earning families?

MELISSA MCCAW: It could be a challenge.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): It could be?

MELISSA MCCAW: It could be a challenge.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Yeah. All right. I -- I would tend to agree with that. Now, FMLA, which we discussed -- you discussed briefly, and again, a laudable goal. How would the 0.5 percent tax on people’s payroll -- it would come out of their paycheck -- would that also be consistent with the goal of making this an affordable place to live?

MELISSA MCCAW: Depending on how was bearing that cost.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Okay.

MELISSA MCCAW: So, whether it is employee or employer and you know there are a couple ways to.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Right. What I -- what I heard yesterday and what we all -- many of us heard
yesterday was a proposal to have that come directly from the employee. Are you suggesting that it should come from the employer instead?

MELISSA MCCAW: I’m not suggesting. I’m saying there are options, and our proposal hasn’t been finalized.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you for that, and I appreciate it. The administration has been vocally supportive of tolls, and we’ve heard that generally in the form of tolls on just trucks. The studies I’ve seen indicate that the revenue from just tolls on trucks is not sufficient and that we would need to expand that, and some of the studies we have seen have as many as 80 or so gantries across the state of Connecticut. I’m certainly not going to hold you to this but -- but what is OPMs approach to that in terms of balancing the need to generate revenue for the state while also making sure that as you said before this is an affordable place to live?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. So, the -- we have a new DOT commissioner who has been asked to evaluate the toll options and make a recommendation to the governor. Obviously, our goal is to -- two things with respect to the special transportation fund is to provide financial sustainability but also ensure that we’re making an adequate level of infrastructure investment. Those two options really need to be further converted into a pro forma so that the administration can make an informed decision about whether the position remains as trucks only and whether or not that would allow the appropriate level of investment that’s needed in the special transportation fund as well as considering the other options. The governor has not finalized his position with respect to tolls and will -- is
looking to partner with the legislature through the legislative session, but essentially, you know, we’ve got a 10-year look. We have continuing deficits in the special transportation fund. We -- the DOT really needs to solidify their pro forma on what both of those tolling plans would look like and to the extent to what it would be adequate to bring balance and -- and at that point, he would be in a position to make a better -- more informed decision.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. So -- so tolls on all vehicles around the table right now.

MELISSA MCCAW: A decision has not been made on tolls.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Fair enough. Again, mentioning affordability and helping middle-class families in Connecticut, with that in mind, we’ve seen a proposal that did not come from the administration -- in fairness -- to create a statewide property tax and a statewide tax on vehicles, specifically to vehicles. I mean that money would come into OPM, I assume, in some way, shape, or form, and there would be a formula to redistribute that. What is -- what would your approach be to determining what that formula should look like? And I know you wouldn’t do that in a bubble. I understand that, but I’m just -- would like to get a little bit of a sense of what your mindset would be in redistributing that money.

MELISSA MCCAW: I have not seen the proposal, so I -- you know, I can’t -- I’m opined in depth. Well, you know, there are a couple ways to do that. I mean certainly I’m assuming it is above and beyond. It’s an additional percentage or half a percent on the -- on the car sales tax, and so if that were the case, I think measures that are reflective of a
municipalities wealth would be a potential you know basis for a formula, so in other words, if you have a greater ability to pay -- you know, the challenge we have is that our distressed cities are struggling. They tend to have the highest mill rates, and so you know a wealth indicator would be one option for consideration on how to distribute funds.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): So, something of like a wealth redistribution?

MELISSA MCCAW: Potentially.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Okay. Switching gears slightly, when you look at the state budget, you -- you can’t avoid looking at that big piece of the pie that is Social Services. Much of which many people say is -- is sort of a fixed cost. I don’t necessarily believe that. You’re gonna be asked a question. You’re gonna have to come up with a budget that addressed that. What are some of the things that you are thinking right now that might help to get those costs, not just under control, but actually shrink those costs?

MELISSA MCCAW: Well, I’m not gonna show our hand, per se.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Well, we’re all on the same team, so.

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. Look, we’ve seen considerable growth in caseload within the health and human services side of the budget. Besides just looking at, you know, who and how many we’re serving, certainly getting under the hood and looking at what we pay, and do we have the most opt -- you know, if we optimize pharmacy for -- for example. That’s an
area I think we’ve done incredibly well. You know, there are opportunities to make sure we’re doing the appropriate auditing and making sure that we -- we are paying for services that should -- should actually be paid for, so that’s more like a quality control. You know, there are -- there are options with respect to utilization management, right? And making sure -- you know, you could look at items such as prior authorizations and things of that nature, and so I mean I think when you look at it it’s -- we are providing the following level of benefits, are we providing the appropriate level? Are we doing so in the most cost-effective manner? And then who are we serving? And so there are -- there are a couple of, you know, aspects of our program that can be considered, and the administration is putting a lot of effort in looking at whether we are optimizing in what we’re paying. So for example, we optimized on being a part of a pharmacy consortium, you know? Pricing and things of that nature, so you know, we’ll a little -- we’ll have more details on the 20th, but certainly going very broad.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, and I appreciate that, and obviously, you recognize the -- the challenges there and that it is such a large part of the budget and you really can’t -- you can’t address the budget without addressing that.

MELISSA MCCAW: Absolutely.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I appreciate your -- your recognition of that. Just shifting gears ever slightly before -- before I start to wrap up. Obviously, you’ve been in a position to advise a large municipality on fiscal matters. Do you
believe that cities receive their fair share of state funding at this point?

MELISSA MCCAW: Well, it depends on -- you know, look, the centers that have a considerable portion of taxes and property, their hands are somewhat tied in their ability to raise adequate revenues, even when you’re ensuring that you’re -- you’re minimizing the level of growth. They tend to be the municipalities that have the highest mill rates in the state, the extent to which they can invite additional investment and new businesses into the towns is challenging. The truth of the matter though, however, is that the state’s resources are rather limited, so the question on whether or not it’s an adequate level of funding is also question about what is our ability to pay? And that is the discussion we’ll be having on February 20 into early June, and so I believe that there -- there are some that are struggling and then, you know, there might be other municipalities that have a greater ability to withstand a reduction in municipal aid. Certainly, the fact that we are unable to fully fund (inaudible - 00:47:22) is a challenge, but that is a challenge that we might -- I don’t see how we can overcome.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you very much. Thank you. This was -- this was enlightening. I really do appreciate it. It’s unfortunate we didn’t have a chance to talk before today.

MELISSA MCCAW: I probably should have done that.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you very much.

MELISS MCCAW: Sure.
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): The chair recognizes Representative Yaccarino. You have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. McCaw. Very impressive resume. Just a couple questions. What struck me when you had mentioned in your testimony about science and bioscience in expansion. As OPM secretary, what -- would you try to play a role in that? I know for me I think we need -- we could have so much more expansion to do in Connecticut as far as the scientists and sustainable jobs, but it has to come through tax policy many times, so I’d like to hear your -- your thoughts on that.

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. So, I think it would be -- you know, I would work collaboratively with the governor’s office in terms of his vision. You know, I was recently engaged in a conversation between key business leaders and our constituents of higher education, and I think there’s an opportunity to sync up business and higher ed so that they are developing programs that produces the type of graduates in specific areas of expertise that businesses are looking for, and so I do think that is one area that we can improve upon, and they are starting to -- I think like a collaboration is -- is building in that area. Certainly, our work -- from a workforce development perspective, I think that we can tighten up some of our strategies in that area as well, but I was very pleased to see the type of dialogue that was occurring between higher ed and you know, CEOs of major businesses here in the state of Connecticut, you know, again, indicative of the type of leaderships and engagement that Governor Lamont has promised and is starting to deliver on.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. So, as far as this tax structure we had passed last year of venture capitalists income tax reduction for personal income. It’s capped at about 7000 per year of whatever you make. Would you be in favor of keeping that or trying to expand it to draw more VCs because if you look at Massachusetts and we look at New York, they’re loaded with VCs and loaded with jobs, and we’re right between them, and we have a lower rate structure -- rent structure in Connecticut as far as space. I mean something is going to have to come from us and also OPM and DECD, and we’re gonna have to take a stance I think, and I’d like --

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. We’re -- we’re still finalizing our tax package and so I won’t opine at this time.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. As far as -- we’ve spoken enough about Hartford, but our state debt. I’m sure you’re going to have a strong approach to pay our debt down and work with the legislature with volatility cap on capital spending, keeping those -- I think important provisions in place.

MELISSA MCCAW: Yes.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Your take on that?

MELISSA MCCAW: I -- I am -- I am a particular fan of the volatility cap. It forces discipline in -- in our revenues and you know, obviously helps us to mitigate some of the highest of peaks in the valleys, and so it also forces some discipline on making sure we’re making some adequate investments in the budget reserve fund, so I am a supporter of the volatility account.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. I’m looking forward to working with you, and --

MELISSA MCCAW: Likewise.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Pleasure meeting you tonight.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yes. The floor is yours, representative.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations on your nomination.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you, representatives.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Yeah, if approved, I’m sure I’ll be working quite closely with you as the ranking member of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee.

MELISSA MCCAW: I look forward to it.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And -- and some of the questions that were asked before, and I know you weren’t -- you weren’t involved in the legislative discussion on -- on the Hartford bailout. I was and my understanding was similar to -- to what Senator Fasano’s was, and then ultimately how it got implemented. Shifting from being the financial officer of the city of Hartford who obviously benefitted quite greatly from -- from that bailout program and putting on the hat as the now the Office of Policy and Management Director for the state of Connecticut; do you believe that that bailout as structured under the previous administration is
still good policy for the state of Connecticut moving forward?

MELISSA MCCAW: Well, you know, here’s what I would say is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to an --

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Sure.

MELISSA MCCAW: Urban or any municipality’s financial struggles. The situation that we -- the collective we being, you know, the city, the state of Connecticut, the Malloy administration, and the legislative leadership that we were in was that the choice was the blackeye and the reputational damage of our capital city filing bankruptcy, and the city of Hartford was prepared to take that route, and the state and the governor decided that that was not the option that they thought was in the best interest of the state of Connecticut. My job as OPM secretary is not necessarily to assume that every municipality that’s in fiscal distress gets the Hartford bailout deal, but you know, my job as co-chair of the MARB is to make sure that they’re taking all measures necessary to right their own ship. I think I have that experience because I’ve been on the frontlines in Hartford, and I will not commit that every solution looks like Hartford’s arrangement, but what I will commit to is bringing that expertise to the table and helping to lead that accountability with the municipalities into the greatest extent possible that they can turn their own financial situations around.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): So, do you believe that the city of Hartford did everything it possibly could prior to getting the bailout?

MELISSA MCCAW: Absolutely. Absolutely.
REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, that the only solution was the -- the I think it was 20-year or 30-year bailout -that the state entered into.

MELISSA MCCAW: That -- it was that option, or it was filing for bankruptcy and defaulting, so absolutely.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, in your resume, you talk about working on the municipal revenue plan and being a member of the MARB, and I know that plan called for 5 years, I believe, of recovery for the city and how -- how you would structure that, but it is my understanding that just 2 or 3 years in it was looking at deficits in that plan; is that correct? Is that --

MELISSA MCCAW: The plan assumes that we will continue to see growth -- grand list growth. If you look back historically, it kind of takes an average over, you know, a 10 to 15-year period to the extent that we do not see that growth. The city will have to continue to mitigate, so there -- I wouldn’t say there are deficits built in, but there are certainly milestones and goals that need to be achieved in order for that plan to be sustainable. In terms of the cost-saving measures and the reductions and the labor savings, we have achieved all of those items, and so it will critically be important that the economic development focus is maintained so that we can see the results in the grand list, and certainly, you know, municipal aid to the extent of their significant municipal aid cuts, it will continue to impact their bottom line. That plan assumes level -- level municipal aid. It doesn’t build in any optimistic expectations from the state of Connecticut because we all know the state and the position that we’re in, so again, the focus will be
around their economic development plan and achieving those milestones.

**REP. DAVIS (57TH):** And, shifting to your new role as the I guess chairman of the MARB, what do you foresee as potential things that could be done if those goals aren’t met by the city of Hartford and you know, what actions could be taken outside of additional state aid to achieve the reductions that would be necessary?

**MELISSA MCCAW:** Sure. You know, the decisions are not easy ones. The -- the city would have to decide that they’re going to make less capital investments in maintaining their infrastructure, their roads, their sidewalks, their flood control. You know, they’d have to begin to skinny down some of those expectations. They would have to look at an increase in mill rate. They could look at items such as the residential assessment ratio and picking up some additional revenues there as well. Those are the levers I think for the most part on the -- you know, significant portion of that budget is labor and fringe benefits. Those contracts have been renegotiated and a significant savings have already been baked into that recovery plan, so those would -- those would be the more immediate levers that I expect that the city would have to avail themselves of.

**REP. DAVIS (57TH):** And, my understanding is that under that recovery plan the -- the city was on kind of a pay-as-you-go on the capital improvements, that they weren’t going to be seeking additional bond proceeds in order to pay for some of these. However, with the last administration at least, we saw some of that shift of what would traditionally be, you know, streetscapes or -- or road
improvements and things like that shifted to now the state bonding for those projects. Do you foresee as OPM secretary that the state would continue to pick up the slack, if you will, for the city of Hartford and do those what otherwise traditionally would be city-based bonding projects and that the state would then be stepping in and doing those going forward as well?

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure. I think in general municipalities across the state seek state support for capital-type projects. I think the city is well-positioned with the resources that have been provided under the prior administration to be able to withstand and maintain infrastructure, you know, at least over the next, you know, 2+ years. A big component of their ability to do so would be the continuation of the corporate contribution. If you recall, the -- the leading businesses have contributing $10-million-dollars annually over a 5-year period. If they were to rescind on that agreement, the city would be in trouble with its capital plan.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, moving onto the -- the MARB and overseeing some of these other cities that are going to have problems; do you foresee cities like Bridgeport or Waterbury or West Haven or the ones that are potentially struggling coming to -- to similar agreements with the state of Connecticut or attempts to at least come to similar agreements for some sort of bailout or -- or payment of debt from the state for these other cities as well?

MELISSA MCCAW: At this time, I do not. West Haven has submitted a recovery plan that shows that they would achieve sustainability. The plan that was submitted under prior leadership does rely on
continued municipal restructuring funds. I’d like to see that weaning off -- for lack of a better term -- occur consistent with the plan or faster. Sprague has just submitted a plan, and it has not yet been vetted, but they’re -- and neither of those two municipalities is there any notion of a contract assistance agreement.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, from the legislation that was passed in 2017, that authorized the ability for the treasurer and the governor to go into one of these contract assistance agreements; does it prohibit one of these other cities from entering into an agreement with the state of Connecticut similar to what was done with Hartford?

MELISSA MCCAW: It depends on the tier of municipality. I believe it’s tier 4. I apologize. I don’t have the legislation in front of me, and I know that Sprague is not designated as a -- as a tier 3. They are a tier 2. I’d have to refresh my memory on that, but I believe it’s limited to tier 4 municipalities.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): So, do you believe that it should remain to be open-ended in ability for the governor and the treasurer to simply be able to go into one of these agreements outside of legislative approval or do you think it’s something that either A) Should require legislative approval for these future agreements, potential future agreements, or do you think that there should be limits placed on what these agreements could have by the legislature moving forward?

MELISSA MCCAW: I think it would be prudent for the administration and the legislature to be in agreement as to what the abilities of the administration -- the executive branch are with
respect to contract assistance. I’d like to avoid a future-type conversation where one side does not agree with the spirit of the law, and so we should probably have that conversation about what, you know, that would look like -- could potentially look like.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, with some of the previous questions and the discussion of property taxes and the impact that it has both on large municipalities and small, and you mentioned that you guys are at least considering the concept of a -- I think you used the word wealth redistribution for property taxes -- do you also foresee the administration going down that route with other taxes whether it be income taxes or corporate taxes?

MELISSA MCCAW: I do not.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, right now, I know during the campaign the governor had mentioned that, you know, all options are on the table and that we’re likely going to have some sort of tax increases, and I know the budget isn’t to be made until February 20, and -- and your conversation with Representative Perillo about the groceries tax in particular, none of those decisions have been made; but what kind of tax increases could we at least are under consideration by the administration at this time?

MELISSA MCCAW: I’m not able to comment on that at this time.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Okay. And, you mentioned to Representative Yaccarino that you’ve very supportive of the volatility cap and something that I am as well. What about the other caps? The -- what sometimes called the revenue cap, which requires us to build in that cushiony tier. Appropriations have
to be less than what our projected revenues are on a sliding scale going forward, the spending cap, and in particular as well the bonding cap. What are your thoughts on those?

MELISSA MCCAW: Well, I’m still becoming -- I still may not have said some of these. Look, we have a lot of caps, and so the question is how do they interplay together? And, so we’re continuing to evaluate that. I might have better recommendations for you on February 20, so I’m going to wait to opine at the time.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, that’s fair. I understand. And, kind of shifting gears to another part that was much talked about during the -- during the campaign but I hadn’t really heard very much of going forward is union negotiations and have those -- has that process begun where the administration has begun meeting with -- with the state employee unions to discuss ways to save money for the state of Connecticut moving forward?

MELISSA MCCAW: We are not currently in any formal negotiation.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Has a request been made to enter into formal negotiations?

MELISSA MCCAW: A formal request has not been made to enter into a formal redundant negotiation.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Understood. And, with this new administration, there’s been some changes made as to how things are going to be -- I guess the administration itself is going to operate, and previously, the office of Policy and Management kind of handled both policy and management in overseeing agencies and what not, and now, this new position of
the chief operating officer, I think -- I believe the title is -- will have much more of the day-to-day management, so I’m curious as to what you foresee your role as OPM secretary going forward and what the differences of what past administrations did and what you foresee your role now as OPM secretary if you are not going to be handling the day-to-day management as much?

MELISSA MCCAW: So, I think there’s a little bit of a misconception. You know, it is my understanding under the prior administration that the chief of staff function did have a lot of that operational component and that the OPM secretary and the chief of staff worked jointly, and so that will continue. Mr. Mounds in his role of COO, and I will collectively manage, you know, the operational portfolio. It’s very hard to have operating-type questions without talking numbers and money, and so I will still very much -- you know, my role will still have a -- will still be a significant part of the conversation, so that will be a shared function. You know, the governor has a very specific goal with respect to metrics and performance for state agencies, and so Mr. Mounds will lead that effort, and so that is a function that will -- that he will kind of take the lead on and I will partner with him on.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you for your -- for your answers. I appreciate it. I look forward to, if confirmed, I guess I should say because it hasn’t happened yet; but if or when confirmed, I look forward to working with you moving forward.

MELISSA MCCAW: Likewise. Thank you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you.
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you. Any further questions? I believe Representative DiMassa -- oh, go ahead, Godfrey.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you. How are you?

MELISSA MCCAW: Very well. Thank you.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Congratulations, although you -- you may find out you’ve gotten out of the firepan --

MELISSA MCCAW: Yes. Indeed.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): To get into the fire.

MELISSA MCCAW: Indeed. [Laughing].

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Certainly, it’s a much more republic job that you’ve entered into. Let me just say I’ve been around this place since 1977 [chuckle], and I worked for the committee that actually created the Office of Policy and Management at the time, and state Representative Alice Meyer back then, she represented one of the districts in Greenwich, described your role as the prime minister of the state of Connecticut. In more modern terminology, I always have thought of it over these many years as being the chief operations officer of the state of Connecticut, and so the honeymoon is still on, but I’m a little leery of some of the pronouncements that I keep hearing, and I want to talk because we didn’t have an opportunity to do a one-on-one, and I regret that the Lamont administration -- I’ve only seen two of the cabinet officers -- to come over and just have the one-on-one. You know, it’s our job to screen all these nominations for the entire General Assembly, and certainly, part of that is just to kind of be able to look each other in the eye --
MELISSA MCCAW: Sure.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Understand one’s character, not just the stuff on -- on a resume, and I wish that the administration was doing more of that. I -- I -- as I’ve said, I’ve seen only two of the nominees, and I know that was because they have really, really, really good legislative liaisons, and it was both DOT and DCF that were careful enough to get the new commissioners there over here. So -- so that kind of leaves me -- I kind of take -- I’ve been around a while, so I kind of take a long view of things, and one of the biggest problems we’ve had for a while is the relationship of your office and the administration with the General Assembly. Ben Barnes was often described here as the evil Vizier for the Malloy administration which I think is just -- it’s humorous, but there’s always a little bit of truth under humor, and I think that he never understood we’re not a city council. We’re a legislature. We have our own constituencies. They vary widely. I’m an urban legislator. I’m from Danbury. I have the downtown part, and -- and so my view is different than a suburban legislator or rural legislator, but the thing that upset me most about the lack of relationships between the General Assembly and -- and OPM and the administration was the lack of transparency and the lack of cooperation. It was much too confrontational, and I don’t think in the long-term that’s good for the people of the state of Connecticut or the people of my district. Its -- its -- it continues to be a very big concern.

A couple of examples, the 2017 budget that was adopted in October of that year in which I voted against, unfortunately, the legislature went without consultation with the administration, so you know,
it’s two errors. It’s a two-way street error that the cooperation wasn’t there, and -- and we spent a good part of the next year fixing all the mistakes. The most egregious of which I found to be that the -- that budget downgraded the Department of Veteran’s Affairs Hospital to a nursing home in order to affect $2-million-dollars in savings. Come to find out, after this thing is law for a few months, the state of Connecticut was going to lose $6-million-dollars from Medicaid and -- and Medicare because the rates that the federal government pays are much lower for nursing homes than they are for a hospital, and that -- that saddens me that the cooperation was not there to -- and I think on both sides, there wasn’t a level of trust, and I think that desperately needs to be changed. And, part of that also was the both OPM refused to allow cabinet-level commissioners to actually provide information and discuss pending legislation with those commissioners. It was really a matter of everything had to go through OPM, and OPM just wouldn’t give us information. One of the many reasons that led to the legislature attempting to do its own budget in 2017 with too many errors in it.

I need to know whether the Lamont administration and OPM is going to be actually transparent and cooperative and not confrontational. Is this former practice of not providing information to the General Assembly going to end or not?

MELISSA MCCAW: Well, I -- I -- I regret that you missed my opening remarks. I talked a little bit about my background and particularly my time at the University of Hartford. You know, higher ed is a very unique place --

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Oh, yeah. [Chuckle].
MELISSA MCCAW: It’s -- you don’t achieve significant change with the top down or hostile-type approach. It’s building buy-in and building relationships and creating trust, and so I often liken that to the style and approach that I think is necessary for the executive branch to work with the legislature. I think the governor has set a tone in terms of making sure that the table is larger, and stakeholders are at the table, and that says that we are about transparency. We’re about open and honest dialogue, and you know, so to answer your question, I lead in a transparent way. I lead with integrity. I’m here to partner and work with you. That is my style. The goal is not to have a hostile working relationship. It’s to have a -- we will respectfully disagree at times, let’s be honest.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): That’s legitimate.

MELISSA MCCAW: But it is to make sure that the product that we end up with is one that is in the best interest of the state of Connecticut, and so absolutely the Lamont administration is coming in with a fresh start. We are not looking to continue, you know, that type of relationship, and we hope that that spirit of that goal is on the other side of the table as well.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you. That’s really refreshing I have to say ‘cause I’ve been here -- here for 30 years, and it was a very difficult time the last few years in trying to put together budgets without really having a sufficient support, cooperation, and transparency between the -- the branches. I also want to bring to your attention the United Way last summer and they’re hardly an ideological or lobbying group, came out a report on ALICE, assets limited, income constrained employed,
and there were some very frightening statistics and information in there. Number one, the poverty level in Connecticut is about 10 percent. Number two, the ALICE families -- these are families that are struggling to put food on the table, clothes on their backs, get their kids educated, keep a roof over their head was another 30 percent. In Danbury, it is 40 percent, which means half the people who live in Danbury are struggling at various -- various levels to -- to just survive from week-to-week, from paycheck-to-paycheck, and -- and I fear, again, long view, the history of the United States in the 20th century was taking the working class and moving the up in the middle class, and unfortunately, in the 21st century is pushing them back down toward ALICE and toward -- toward poverty, and I’m concerned that both the commission that dealt with these last -- the last couple of years and -- and just so you -- to be transparent, I don’t think it was worth the paper it was printed on quite frankly because that was a bunch of rich people. No labor people on it. No working-class people on it. It just said we need to continue to make Connecticut safe for rich people, not for my constituents who are struggling, and then when I hear, you know, the proposals floating around in the media of sales tax increases, taxes on groceries I will -- I will make a promise and I don’t -- I will not vote to increase the sales tax, add it to other stuff, and certainly, not put it on groceries because it’s time we stopped taxing struggling working families, and somewhere between 8.5 and 9 percent of their income goes to state and local taxes while billionaires are paying 5 percent. I think we need more equity in that, and I’m hoping you’re gonna look -- you’ll take a good look at the ALICE report. It’s -- it’s really damning and frightening, so I’m -- I certainly would ask you to
do that, and -- and -- and take it seriously. I’m very nervous about the future of the state of Connecticut and its economy because of the things that are in that very nonpartisan, very nonideological-driven reports. The United Way for crying out loud. It’s -- which is funded in large part by businesses, but whose concern is the services -- Social Services especially -- that are -- are provided to people like my constituents. [Coughing] Excuse me.

I certainly commend the -- the governor’s promise on the minimum wage. It makes a big difference in my district. I’ve probably voted -- I don’t know -- 6, 7, 8 times to increase minimum wages, and the argument always is, oh, people will get fired and the economy will go bust, and business operations will be hurt. That’s never happened [laughing]. All of these times that I’ve -- I’ve chosen to support a minimum wage increase, the economy got better. People in that level of -- of income when they get a raise, they spend it, and I’m aware that the economy booms when dollars turn over, so I -- I certainly commend the governor on that. I certainly commend the work and have cosponsored the bill with earned paid family medical leave because I do appreciate your statement regarding these values, that we value families, that we value people who are trying to move up the economic ladder, which is why I also oppose -- repeal to the state tax. We -- we need to have that conversations too. And where is the focus going to be? is the focus going to be continuing our too long policies that -- that let rich people off or is it going to be we’re going to focus on recovering the movement of working families back up into the middle class, and roughly how?
MELISSA MCCAW: Well, the -- the governor’s plan is still being finalized, but here is what I will say to you. Your comments with respect to the struggle of the average person in the state of Connecticut is one that resonates very well. If you’ve read a little bit about my background, I come from very humble beginnings, and I think that’s important because the lens in which we work when we are looking at finances and budget and policy, I will always have the lens of the mom who is struggling to buy food, right? And, so I think that if anything it should give you an assurance that the struggling folks in Danbury that are in poverty are not going to be forgotten at the table. I cannot tell you the final package, Representative Godfrey, but I will tell you that that perspective and the experience of those that are struggling in the state of Connecticut will be at the table when decisions are being finalized.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): That is so good to hear. I can’t tell you how happy I am to -- to heart that kind of statement. It’s not -- let me, you know, just reiterate -- it’s not just the people in poverty. It’s the -- the --

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Other -- the other --

MELISSA MCCAW: Absolutely. I agree.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): 30 percent that’s --

MELISSA MCCAW: I agree.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): That’s struggling just to make a living. It’s a passion of mine obviously, which is why I’m raising it here today, so Godspeed and good luck.
MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Dealing with all of the currents and undertow here in -- here in Hartford and in the legislature. I am very happy, and I hope we will continue to be transparent and be cooperative rather than confrontational, and that we will focus on people who need the most help. Thank you, very much, and good luck.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you. Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much, Representative Godfrey. We’ve been joined by our Senate chairs who would like the floor. Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, now.

MELISSA MCCAW: Good afternoon.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Senator Looney and I have both been tied up with some other things and kind of surprised I guess that you’re still on the hot seat here and we’re only number one on the agenda.

MELISSA MCCAW: It’s warm. It’s quite warm. Yes.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): [Laughing] And that’s -- but it’s an opportunity to say hello and to certainly ask a question or two. First of all, congratulations on the nomination --

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): And, I think that you’ll do a great job. Senator Looney and I have had the opportunity to sit -- sit and chat with you privately, and frankly, what I saw when we had our conversation was somebody who does think creatively,
somebody who does think outside the box, and when you were presented with a number of kind of the old problems, you came back with very creative solutions, and I found that very refreshing —

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Because we -- we have worked hard over the last 8 years to reduce pension costs. We’ve cut billions from the state budget. We have fewer state employees. And, so in order to make sure that we are working to get our budget under control from the standpoint of our pension issues and the number of other things that contribute to some of those problems, we do have to think very creatively, and that takes somebody who can kind of come in from a fresh perspective who has some experience but can kind of lead a different way, so I -- I appreciated your time that afternoon and the answers that you gave as well ‘cause I thought they were very good answers. The one -- one thing I want to ask you and you may have mentioned this earlier and I apologize if you did is that, you know, people speak a lot about priorities in the building and our constituents talk about, you know, what are your priorities for the state of Connecticut? And obviously, our budget is a priority and having a balanced budget and meeting the needs of -- of our constituents like Representative Godfrey said and I’m sure others have said this morning and this afternoon, and there’s -- whether it’s transportation, whether it’s education, whatever it is, there are a number of needs that are out there and many social services too. My answer always to that is growing our tax base. You know, you solve a lot of problems when you grow the tax base, when you are -- and fill the 40,000 jobs that are open right now -- or 25,000 jobs I should say with some of our
defense contractors or the 4000 IT jobs that we have or -- or helping businesses to expand that are here in Connecticut and hoping to grow some others as well.

So beside -- you know, I think a lot of times people just look at this position as just the budget when, again, folks like Representative Godfrey said, you know, it’s way more than that. It’s -- it’s -- it’s larger than that and -- and working with Mr. Mounds as COO there’s a lot of policy that goes into what you’re doing because the policy hopefully will help grow our budget reserves -- you know, the income coming in because we’re expanding our economy, so how do you kind of -- how do you see or what -- what -- I look at growing the economy as almost a three-legged stool. There’s transportation, affordable housing, and education because we got to make sure we’re educating our kids and ensuring that they’re -- we’re not only educating 20 or 30 percent, especially in our urban areas, that they can fill those jobs that are open right now. So, how do you view kind of the policy side of what you’re trying to do to match some of your budget goals that you have to get the budget in a place where we feel like we have a little more certainty? We know that, again, cutting billions of dollars and having fewer employees has -- has made some changes, but I think that wrestling kind of this pension stuff as well in creative ways that you had spoke about, but kind of growing our tax base and how does that -- from a policy standpoint, how does that -- what are you thinking on that from that standpoint?

MELISSA MCCAW: So that’s a loaded question, so I would start with, you know, the administration’s priority is to provide greater confidence and stability, and so just from a purely financial
perspective, you know, one of the key goals is to -- is to start making decisions now that reap some -- some momentum in the out years, right, and so our pro-chat looking at the structural gap that we face is taking those major key areas of the budget, but when you -- any number you touch has the policy undercurrent. You know, I would say from the perspective of our pension cost, it is establishing a payment plan, for lack of better terms, that is consistent with our growth in revenues and one that we can consistently maintain commitment to. I’d say from the perspective of education I appreciate the work that the legislature has done. With respect to the goals of fleet funding the -- the education -- the ECS formula, and so you know those are items that are already in play that I think send the message to our communities that education is important, and that the state is willing to honor its -- its commitments. You know, when I think about, you know, our municipal centers, how do we provide them with tools, greater tools at a local level to meet their service demand needs? How do we support that? There -- there’s juvenile justice. You know, certainly a lot of work to be done in that area as well, and so you know our approach will be broad, but in terms of the larger economic development, we want our taxpayers and our families and our mothers and fathers and our businesses to feel that we are leading in a way where we’re making the proper decisions. That we’re providing a stable path forward, and that I -- and also the way in which the executive and the legislative branch leads I think sends a sense that we have it together, and that is a goal that I think we need to achieve.

You know, the role of OPM secretary is clearly not just budget, and quite frankly, every line item in
that budget has underlying policy, so you can’t separate the two. These are some of the areas that we are currently considering in our current package and that we will certainly share more details with you on February 20.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): All right. Thank you and thank you for that. I now it wasn’t an easy one to answer. It was maybe more of a statement with a question mark at the end [Laughing] --

MELISSA MCCAW: Of course. Of course.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Than anything else, but I do appreciate your -- the work you’ve done so far and your approach -- your creative approach to the position and some of the problems that we have. All states have issues and challenges. Connecticut is not unique. We have a lot of great things going for us as well.

MELISSA MCCAW: Yeah.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): And we need to make sure that we are focusing on our strengths while still working to tackle some of the challenges that we have, and I certainly feel that you are well-qualified to do that as well, so.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you for taking on this major responsibility. I look forward to working with you, and congratulations on your appointment.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you, likewise.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Duff. I believe the next was a question by Senator Bergstein.

SENATOR BERGSTEIN (36TH): Yeah, I -- I just wanted to thank you so much for your service, for putting yourself forward to serve the state, and tackling really difficult issues, and I wanted to pick up on the line of questioning from my colleague, Representative Godfrey, about what type of leadership, what type of transparency we can expect from you and from your office, and I think that you’re demeanor in this hearing is evidence enough that you are incredibly transparent and open and respectful, nonconfrontational, and -- and this is exactly the kind of dialogue that we need to have about the toughest issues in our state, and I would also just respectfully ask my colleagues to -- to try to not classify people as rich people, and certainly not to blame rich people as the enemies of our state. Everybody who is a citizen of the state is equally responsible for our outcome. We need to work together, and we have to stop vilifying one another, and -- ‘cause it’s not rich people who are the enemy, it’s divisiveness and lack of understanding. So, we can work together as colleagues and equals to remedy that, and thank you for your service.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Bergstein. We have a -- the floor now goes to our Senate vice-chair, Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon --

MELISSA MCCAW: Good afternoon, Senator.
SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Madam Secretary. Thank you again for coming to my office for a fairly extensive meeting and discussion that we had, and as others have said, I’m enormously impressed by your credentials and your prior experience and your -- at your quite young age with 7 years as a budget analyst at OPM right out of college and another 7 years as finance director for the University of Hartford, and then the last 3 years and very challenging times as the budget director for the -- for the city of Hartford, so I -- I think you are extraordinarily well prepared for this position because you have been in the both dealing with the nuts and bolts of knowing what OPM does on a day-to-day basis as an analyst yourself but also then being at the high level administrative position in a city that was dealing with a financial crisis and needing to interact with the state during that.

The one -- the one question I would like to ask you and -- and apart from just commending you and commending the governor for the nomination is regarding the -- the MARB structure, looking at the troubled municipalities, without asking you to name anyone in particular, are there municipalities now or soon likely to be -- in your view -- in need of coming under the MARB structure, and if so, if you could say approximately how many? I mean without -- without listing names.

MELISSA MCCAW: You know, I’ve heard some inclinations that New Haven -- certainly, know that New Haven is experiencing financial challenges. You know, one of the ideas that I have is with respect to the municipal fiscal indicator report that OPM annually produces by statute. You know, an opportunity that we have would be to identify some of the key metrics that would be indicators of red
flags. You know, essentially, the MARB is a responsive measure to a municipality that’s already in a significant state of distress. The Municipal Finance Advisory Commission is a -- a committee that’s available if a municipality wants to self-impose some support, right? And, so you know what I think the state needs to be thinking about is identifying those key red flags, whether it’s your fund balance goes negative or your fund balance drops below a certain threshold or your issuing you know bond or tax anticipation notes that are indicators of a potential issue and perhaps, require those municipalities to present themselves in front of the Municipal Finance Advisory Commission so that we can address some of these issues before they become MARB relevant, per se, so you know, I think there are opportunities to build upon, you know, existing policy as well as legislative requirements so that the state can step in and not in a financial way but in terms of an operational -- from an operational perspective or having other expertise at the table to help municipalities before they fall, you know, into a place that requires a more significant level of support.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Well, thank you very much. I know that’s -- that’s something having -- having lived through that, working on the Hartford side, I think you have a unique perspective on it now as reviewing it from the state’s side and the broader context, and I wanted to just thank you again very much, and have great confidence and hope in what you’re going to be doing for us over the next several years.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you. I look forward to working with you.
SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Looney. My vice-chair, Representative Phipps, has the floor.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Good afternoon.

MELISSA MCCAW: Good afternoon.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): First, I want to say congratulations.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I am really looking forward to working with you as a fellow Middletown person. I think -- as matter of fact, I know I’m confident that you will do a wonderful job.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): In the spirit of brevity -- because I think you answered a lot of the questions I would have asked -- if you could just talk a little bit about communication specifically to the general public? I think one of the opportunities that we have or one of the hardest criticism that we have on this side is that our constituents often don’t know where their tax money goes to directly.

MELISSA MCCAW: Sure.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): If you can speak to how A) We can demystify the budgeting process and 2) I think even as you talked about, we have the volatility cap, we have spending cap, we have so many different things. I think it’s really hard for people to understand. So, how do we allow for our general public to better understand the work that you do and the work that we do here in budgeting?
MELISSA MCCAW: That’s an excellent -- excellent question, Representative Phipps, and likewise, I look forward to working with you. You know, to the average consumer picking up our 200-page budget boot or reading an Appropriation Act is not something that most consumers are going to do, and so at a municipal level, a lot of cities and towns have what is called the people’s budget, which is the tool that really kind of breaks down the major components of spending so that, you know, our taxpayers can understand, you know -- you know, 20 -- more than 20 percent is covering health and human services, and you know, the portion that’s for pension costs and healthcare, and so certainly, we can look at some other types of communication tools, perhaps on the OPM website. I -- I also -- I also think that the governor’s proposal with -- with respect to performance and metrics and kind of having a dashboard will be a great tool for the average constituent to go on a website and -- and get a better sense of, you know, the volume for example that flows through a DMV or here’s the benchmark of what we’re setting in terms of the amount of time you should wait in line so that they can begin to see that government is holding agencies accountable to meeting certain expectations.

You know, the way in which the average citizen engages with government is when they’re going to the DFS office or when they’re going to the DMV to renew, right? And, so we need to become a little bit more citizen centric, and some of the governor’s initiatives with respect to, you know, a digital dashboard and you know, essentially breaking down the key areas of service for residents in a one-stop location I think will be useful tools in achieving, you know, the objective that you just described.
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Just two quick things. I’m glad you talked about representation and having a perspective, whether we call it from an ALICE perspective or working families, I still think the term working poor actually makes a heck of a lot more sense. I think if we called it and named it what it was I think there would be a heck of a lot more support for it, so I am appreciative of you taking that approach as we are looking for equitable solutions as we create a budget, and just the last thing. I was talking to a good friend, James, and he said, any sort of trials that joy is coming, so I just wanted to say glad to be working with you.

MELISSA MCCAW: Likewise, thank you.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): That’s a close interpretation.

MELISSA MCCAW: [Laughing].

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps, and the -- the chair now recognizes the -- the very patient Representative DiMassa.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): That lineup got longer and longer, Mr. Chairman [Laughter]. Good morning, Ms. McCaw. Thank you very much for --

MELISSA MCCAW: Good morning.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): Your -- your patience with us this morning. I’m sure that Senator Fasano and the Hospital Association were going to buy you lunch, so you’re probably running late for that.

MELISSA MCCAW: [Laughing].

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): But you know I just want to touch on a couple of things, and I’ll ask you kind of your -- your -- your opinion on them. I’m not gonna keep you long, and I’m not going to discuss a
ton of issues ‘cause like you said there’s a lot in motion, there’s a lot that’s fluid, and you know, things will come out in time, and you’re gonna be back before the General Assembly talking about a lot of these policies. But I think to Representative Godfrey’s point, obviously, just going forwards as far as the hospitals or anything else is concerned, you know, just our word is our bond. The administration’s word is going to be its bond, so to just, you know, obviously be cautious as those --

MELISSA MCCAW: Of course.


MELISSA MCCAW: Of course.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): You know, we can’t hold a new administration accountable for things that were done under a previous administration, so hopefully, going forward, the hospitals will feel more comfortable and reliant on your word. As far as the MARB and West Haven, obviously, I do represent West Haven and sometimes that discussion is led down a path of bailout and those kind of terms, but really, the whole point of -- of the MARB legislation was to take these municipalities as you know that were struggling that were in dire financial condition and ensure that not only did you help them short-term fiscally, but help them get on the right path, providing them resources, providing them research, providing them staff through OPM, and -- and the whole point was we didn’t want these municipalities to struggle for another 5 or 10 years, and possibly go bankrupt. We want to put them in -- in a position where we help them fix their problems, and they come out stronger on the other side of the tunnel. Is that -- obviously, is that correct?
MELISSA MCCAW: That is correct, and you know, I -- I was in the room and watched West Haven go through their process, and sometimes, it’s not just the financial fix. It’s also making sure that they have the right expertise in house, you know. Reporting was a challenge for New Haven. If you can’t report where you’re closing the books on a monthly basis was a challenge; therefore, they would find out too late in the game that they had issues, and so some of that is just making sure that they are making the right hires, have the right systems, have the right policies and procedures and internal controls, and then there are the -- there are the touch decisions on reductions, and sometimes the MARB is helpful in that it gives that municipality some cover to make those difficult choices. But, absolutely, I agree with you 100 percent. It really is about the long-term view and making sure that they have a long-term plan to sustain.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): Thank you for that. And, you know, one of the things I wanted to ask you. Certainly, your resume is -- is outstanding. There is no question and to represent Godfrey’s point, you know, to me, it is about the person, right? It is about sitting and having a conversation with you and just tell me obviously when you got the phone call from -- from the governor -- the governor elect as far as this position, what -- tell me why you took -- took this on, and certainly, I mean you could go anywhere. With this resume, you could go anywhere. Tell me what your motivation is? What do you see for the state? What’s -- what’s your primary objective in your new role?

MELISSA MCCAW: You know, I really wasn’t looking for a change. I -- I loved the work that I was doing in Hartford. You know, I often call myself a
glutton for punishment because Hartford was a very challenging experience. You know, it was blood, seat, and tears to do that work, and initially, I was not receptive to the call. Honored, felt you know with a privilege to have been considered in the running. It really was when I began to have the one-on-one conversation with Governor Lamont and his chief of staff, and I heard the vision and I heard there was heart and passion there, and that there was sincerity, and I felt a call to service. I felt a call to bring, you know, my expertise to the table to help bridge a solution, and so you now for me it’s--it’s always--it’s less so about the role and you know, the glory that some folks say comes along with that [chuckle]--

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): [Laughing].

MELISSA MCCAW: But, it’s about the work, and that’s my character and that’s why, you know, I--I pursued a career in public service. You know, I often tell the story of when I was at Wesleyan and I had my first government 101 class and I was engaged, and through my undergraduate career, I had done some work in--in business at UTC. I loved the numbers, but I was not inspired by the mission, and so, you know, most of what I do is about the people that I’m impacting, the role, and the impact that can be had on the state of Connecticut. And, so to answer your question, it was absolutely call for service. It’s--it’s a difficult job. I have an incredible work ethic, and I work with a great deal of integrity, so I knew there would be a heavy lift on the work, but it would be worth it if my small, you know, contribution could help this state.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): That’s--that’s exactly what I--I think--not only I, but I think my
colleagues want to hear. You know, that’s what it’s all about. You know, when I got involved with this, I always said, you know as far as minimum wage and all these other things, you know, it’s evening the playing field, right? It’s giving people the shot at the American dream -- the Connecticut dream we’ll call it, right? And -- and, that is our most important role here, and I just want to point out, and I’ll close with this. You know, I see a number of your staff behind you -- you know, Sue Weissenberg, Dave Reyes. These are -- you have a great staff. You’ve got great people at OPM.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): And, we’re looking forward to working with you, and with that, I will yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you very much.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative DiMassa. I believe that concludes all the questions and statements on part of the committee. Sorry, that we had to keep you so long here, but you know it’s the -- these are the opportunities we have to meet the incoming commissioners and -- and as you know and heard when it comes to the public policy where we shape or how we shape our budget, where we spend our money, determines largely what our policy decisions and priorities are. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle expressed their concern with the whole hospital issue and feeling that one deal that was already done in the past should not be used as leverage for a new deal. You heard from -- from our side of the aisle that we are in agreement with the administrations priorities in terms of addressing the needs of the working poor, and you know, so there’s a lot to consider, a lot to mull
over. I congratulate you again on being nominated for this position. A tough position but a key position for the future of our state, so before I let you go, there’s a question we ask of all our nominees. I ask them not to take it personal. It’s a matter of protocol. Is there anything in your past that you believe would provide embarrassing to this committee, to the governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

MELISSA MCCAW: No.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MELISSA MCCAW: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): And, that concludes this portion of the public hearing. Let’s take a 2-minute recess to stretch, and we’ll be back with our next nominee, Vannessa Dorantes.

Let’s reconvene. We have with us commissioner designee Vannessa Dorantes of Bristol, Connecticut to be Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families. Before you take a seat Commissioner, please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth? Please be seated. Just as a matter of information for those who may not have attended these -- these hearings before. After we conclude the hearings, we allow for members of the public who want to make a statement to speak. They usually get 3 minutes. We also read into the record any written communication we may have received from the public in that forum spot of the record. Because there’s so many things going on in the building and so many of our members are having -- have to cover several meetings at the same time, you will see people coming in and out of the room. It doesn’t mean they are not interested.
If they happen to be in their legislative office, they have a tv set, closed circuit set, they’ll be watching the proceedings, and we usually keep our votes open without objection to 4:00 p.m. so that individual -- although at the rate we’re going, we may have to stop the hearing at 4:00 p.m., but we usually keep our votes open so that members who were not in the room when we do the votes on the -- on the -- on the recommendation to the legislative body because this committee -- when we pass these resolutions for basically making a recommendation to our colleagues either on the floor of the House or the floor of the Senate to -- to confirm if that’s the recommendation of this committee. So, without further ado, Commissioner, the floor is yours.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you, Representative Vargass. Good afternoon to the Legislative Executive Nomination Committee, to Senator Duff, Senator Fasano, Representative Perillo, and the other distinguished members as they come and enter the Chamber. I am completely humbled to have been nominated by Governor Lamont to lead the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, which is an organization that I have dedicated my entire professional career to. Thank you for the opportunity to lay out my vision and detailed experiences that have led me here today. I received a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Teikyo Post University, and a master’s degree in social work from the University of Connecticut.

My professional experience at DCF spans more than 27 years and 6 different commissioners. Since 2014, I have served as a regional administrator for DCF region 5, which includes Waterbury, Torrington, and Danbury area offices. There I was responsible for the leadership and development of 475 professional
and support staff members and the 43 town catchment area of Northwest Connecticut. I consider region 5 a microcosm of this great state, and that -- in that, it consists of urban, rural, and suburban communities of richly diverse ethnicities and a span of socioeconomic background.

In DCF, I have promoted workforce development, change management, and continuous quality improvement in the child welfare arena. I have also proudly shared DCFs statewide racial justice workgroup, which consists of appointed participants from within the department, as well as external partners. This workgroup includes sub-committees on policy and practice, contracts and procurement, workforce development, and community partnerships. The work of this collective body has been highlighted nationally and, in a bill, codified into Connecticut general statutes last year, public Act 18-111, requires the department to report on racial and ethnic outcome disparities and develop strategies informed by data on referrals, substantiations, removals, placements, and retention.

The DCF racial justice journey has a deep history. Leading this workgroup has challenged DCF and our external stakeholders to turn the mirror inward and examine how personal experiences have shaped some decision making and may manifest as internal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism throughout our helping system. I am poised to continue this work in earnest.

I have also worked as an adjunct professor at Central Connecticut State University over the last 14 years. Having taught elective and core competency courses, I believe that the integration
of social work, theory, and practice must drive processes across the human services. As a licensed master social worker, I will continue to work diligently to lead the department’s mission with integrity and purpose. I have already begun to enhance the department’s leadership capacity to create an environment in which our staff can do our job effectively. This attention to multiple areas of practice will hopefully lead to finalizing the (inaudible - 01:51:51) Consent Decree.

I was one of the beginning classes of social workers to come in through that consent decree and I’m more ready and poised to be able to help the state see the end of it. The urgency of child find is real and must motivate us all to address the often lifelong impact to families engages with the child welfare system continuum. Attention will be to lifting up this 3200-member workforce so they can effectively engage stakeholders in communities across the state of Connecticut through stronger case practice with the 14,500 families we are involved with at any given time. I possess the unique understanding of the agency’s strengths and weaknesses, and we want to help and do so with a multidisciplinary approach to meeting the needs of all kids and families. We are updating our child welfare information system and increasing our use of technology and mobility to incorporate reform expected through the amendment to the Federal Capitol Legislation and implementation of Families First Prevention and Treatment app.

I’m generally optimistic person, but make no mistake, I understand the serious complexities of this work. Not all outcomes that we’re involved with are good. DCF is engaged in critical assessment of our work through a rigorous
qualitative review. I believe that quality supervision is the key to ensuring safety and well-being of the children that we serve. Our department is embarking on an analysis of our infrastructure in our organizational design to identify pain points that will be addressed in short and long-term operational strategies. Leading this effort with us is PC Family Program, a national expert in child welfare policy, and the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab renowned for innovation in public service sectors.

Equally as important is improve the relationships with our local external stakeholders, including legislative policy makers, community service providers, sister state agencies, many of whom are here today. Various courts, law enforcement departments, education, and medical providers all make up our child welfare system. Our advocate community challenges us to work better together towards improved outcomes. I am listening and always have been open to transparent coop collaboration. With the incorporation of a child welfare safety culture, we will continue to evolve. The mantra I have adopted during this transition has been deliberately engaging our partners rowing in the same direction for the same outcomes. I want a responsive DCF to be the team member that everyone trusts is doing its part. Different leaders are needed at different times, and this department is no different. While I had not aspired to this seat, I possess an unwavering commitment to the families that we serve. In weighing the type of leadership that the department needs now in 2019, our number one focus must be to ensure the protection and care of every child DCF is responsible for. We need to work together as an inclusive community as we create
positive pathways for Connecticut’s children to grow and thrive. I humbly ask this committee to support my nomination and again, I would like to thank Governor Lamont, this committee, our providers including our foster parent network, our child welfare professionals in the regions, facilities, and central office divisions, and if I may, extend appreciation to my mentor, P.Z., for planting the social work seed to my supportive colleagues and family members. Many of whom are watching on CT-N. thank you to my soulmate of 26 years with whom I’ve raised our daughters, sometimes in the shadows of my DCF work. To my pop, who’s beaming with pride I’m sure, recording this from the heavens, and to my mom, who instilled education as a priority for her little brown baby girl. I’m letting Connecticut know that as the first African American woman to lead this department I am ready and to DCF, you have my best because I’m counting on you to count on me. Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Commissioner. The -- I’ve always had great respect for social work and for the mission of social workers and their agencies and the way they provide a safety net for the most vulnerable in our society. As a retired teacher and also my wife is a retired teacher, we’ve had the opportunity to work with many social workers throughout the years and with many of these agencies, and you know, DCF is a challenging agency, and we know that it’s a -- a commitment you’ve made, your reputation precedes you. We know that as a division head you had a wonderful reputation as being an efficient and fair manager, so I’m pretty confident that -- that you’ll be a very, very outstanding commissioner. Two of my sister-in-laws, we have discussed in the past work for DCF as social
workers, and we also -- I also have a cousin of mine who worked for Child Protective Services in New York City and later for DCF in New Jersey, and everywhere in the country, it’s the same. You know, it’s tough issues when you’re dealing with vulnerable children, and none of us have a crystal ball, so we make the best decision as we can based on the best information we can get, and so I’ve always defended the agency, and I’ve always -- you know, there were issues with our questions about our prior commissioner, but I always thought that we should cut her as much slack as possible because it is a -- it is a tough mission. At this point, I am going to open it up for fellow committee members that may have questions. I see our -- our ranking member has a question. Representative Perillo, the floor is yours.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Good afternoon. It’s good to see you again. Thanks for taking time out to chat with me last week. Just -- just briefly, I -- I imagine you’re aware of the settlement that’s before the General Assembly now relating to the death of a 3-year-old under the care of DCF. It’s my understanding -- and I could be wrong -- but it’s my understanding that the employees involved in that are still employees of DCF; is that correct?

VANNESSA DORANTES: They are.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): How is that possible?

VANNESSA DORANTES: So, while I was not involved in any of the decisions related to that case [Crosstalk] --

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Nor am I suggesting you were --
VANNessa DORANTES: Or that case at all.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I just -- I want to understand.

VANNessa DORANTES: I think the department often struggles with the issue of accountability plus understanding the demands of the casework, and that’s where my experience as a 27-year employee of the department comes in because I know what good practice looks like and I know how to expect good practice, so I -- I think if we develop a safety culture in which we as leaders create the environment for our staff to do a good job, it’s easier than to mitigate any type of human resource issues that involve employees in one reason -- in one case or another. It’s hard to make a statement with regard to particular staff members or particular cases in a forum like this, but I can tell you that through the development of what I see is special qualitative reviews to understand the serious nature of the work that we do through our partnerships with our medical profession and our medical providers and communities that we can have a workforce that can be super proud of the work that we do, but also make sure that kids and families are safe.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): And I -- I appreciate that mindset and overarching vision. I -- I -- and I would certainly never ask you -- I would never ask you to name names. That’s not where I’m going with this, but you -- you’re -- you’re in an agency that has a history of some challenges.

VANNessa DORANTES: We do.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): And, I think this particular case is indicative of perhaps why those challenges
in many ways haven’t gotten any less. So, in
relation to this specific case, DCF was contacted on
four separate occasions about suspected abuse to
this little girl, and the last time, DCF was
contacted, a secretary sent the call over to a DCF
employee who was on vacation and obviously, unable
to do anything about that. At the time, this --
this little girl was at the hospital in the
emergency room, and she was discharged, and later
that night sexually assaulted and killed in the
home. So, I have to ask the question again. In an
agency where we’ve seen these things happen, if that
doesn’t get you fired, what does?

VANNESSA DORANTES: I can tell you that while I
don’t know all the details of that particular case,
I can tell you that when I learned -- now, I’ve been
in the seat for about 20 days -- when I learned that
the outcome related to specific employees is as
you’ve described, I asked that something be done
about that, and I worked with our workforce academy
to do some individual work with those particular
staff members who were involved, and I -- I can also
tell you that certain things have been put in place
since the egregiousness of the case that we talk
about, that will likely minimize the likelihood of
you seeing something like that happen. We have
enhanced our Human Resources Department. We have
enhanced our qualitative look at cases that are very
similar to that, and that case occurred
approximately 8 years ago at the beginning of
[Crosstalk].


VANNESSA DORANTES: Yeah. The previous
administration and respectfully, it’s coming to a
conclusion right now, so many things have happened
in that timeframe, but also, you know, I also take a different approach and a more swift approach when it comes to the quality of our practice, so I -- I -- again, I can’t speak to what happened 8 years ago with respect to specific employees. I can tell you what I’ve done since taking the seat 20 days ago, and I can also lay for you what I plan to do moving forward.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): So, let -- let’s say we have this -- and God forbid we do.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Sure.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Let’s say we have the same stack pattern.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Sure.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Under your watch. Would those employees still be working for DCF? I can answer that question very confidently. With the safety culture, which means that there are certain high-risk populations that we work with, there are certain understandings that we have about caseload versus workload, there are certain expectations that I have about supervision and that the expectation would be that a case that had high-risk factors would be identified early on and that the supervision of the specific workers that are involved as well as the management of the workers that are involved, would be expected to carry out their practice in the way that is expected, and when that doesn’t occur, we have a robust Human Resources Department that will look to be able to make some consistent decisions related to what happens to the employees going forward.
REP. PERILLO (113TH): But, an HR Department not robust enough to -- in my opinion -- to terminate when -- in my opinion -- they are employees who are probably not fit to work [Crosstalk].

VANNESSA DORANTES: It’s -- it’s a -- it’s a --

REP. PERILLO (113TH): They’re certainly not fit to care for the population that DCF is designed to care for.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Respectfully --

REP. PERILLO (113TH): In my opinion.

VANNESSA DORANTES: It’s a different HR Department than there was in place in two thousand -- 8 years ago. It’s a different HR director and it’s a different HR department.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): So, with that department in place, and now you’ll be commissioner in maybe a week officially.

VANNESSA DORANTES: [Chuckle].

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I hope so anyways. What action would you take as commissioner regarding the individuals in this particular case?

VANNESSA DORANTES: I would work with HR and our legal department and the -- the unions that represent the workers who do this job every day, and again, assess the situation on its individual merit and make sure that the department is accountable because what -- what I pride myself in is I’ve always operated in a place of strong practice, and in my region, we’ve had outcomes that may have not been desirable, but when I look at the work, the work was solid, and if there were areas that we could improve upon, we used that to kind of move on
to our next cases. But, also, we are our own worst critics, and you know, sometimes in the court of public opinion, you -- you can’t get harder on us than we are on ourselves, so I can sit here and it -- it wouldn’t be prudent of me to hypothetically say what I would do, but I can tell you that when practice isn’t up to the standard that I would expect, I would expect them to tell me why, and I -- I’ve worked with our HR Department, I’ve worked with our legal department in the 20 days that I’ve been here, more closely than I ever have in the roles that I’ve had in the past, and I can continue to see that to happen moving forward.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I respect that approach, and I appreciate it. Good luck.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much, Representative Perillo. And, we have another question from Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [Clearing throat] Thank you, Madam Commissioner, for being here.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, God bless you and --

VANNESSA DORANTES: [Laughing].

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Everything that DCF does ‘cause it is -- it’s incredible what you guys do over there and obviously, there’s been some issues that -- that need to be addressed, but overall, DCF is got the core function is to protect the children of our state, and I appreciate everything you do, and being involved in the last couple of bipartisan budgets, I
can truly say it’s not a partisan issue at all, which is -- is something that, you know, both parties really want to help these children as much as possible and help these families.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Yeah.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): ‘Cause on the other side of it is the families, and I know you guys have taken an approach of trying to have the families be as involved as possible in as many cases as possible to the extent that it’s within the safe bounds for that child. I will say that when the announcement was made for you to become commissioner, I think you certainly have a tremendous resume for it and working your way up, but looking from the outside --

VANNESSA DORANTES: Sure.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): In and knowing the challenges that DCF has faced over the last several years, the court decisions that have literally found that it be systematic changes need to happen within the agency, I’m just wondering and in non-accusatory tone in any way, but what do you see you bring to the table from within rather than what I was actually surprised that the governor did not make an appointment from outside and try to change the structure of the department from the outside in I guess.

VANNESSA DORANTES: I was surprised too [Laughing]. [Laughter]. I appreciate the question because from where I sit, you know, I’ve done this work and I’m in this work, and any changes that we’ve made to the focus of the department has been from that perspective, so as we approach a new administration, I approached it from that place of I’ll work really hard for whoever’s gonna be in that seat. Also saying -- with that said, there’s probably about 6
or 7 other states across the country that have also are changing over their administration and an article I read, I was reading the kind of blurb about each person, and I recognized that I don’t look like some of them because I do come from the work, but I think that positions me uniquely to understand the pitfalls that we’ve experienced in the past. I was here 20 years before the previous administration and while I can appreciate the advances that have been made, I’m a different person. I already have communication and transparency with the advocate community, several of which you know who were here, and I think evidence of their presence here today can show you that I have what it takes to understand the rigors of this job. I understand that sometimes for the work that we do it’s not if there’s going to be a fatality, it’s when, and that by putting in structures in place to understand the complexities of child welfare you can get ahead of it to the degree to which you can stand behind the practice, but you can’t prevent the sometimes negative outcomes because of the circumstances that some of our families find themselves in, so I appreciate when people say, you know, why this? Why now? Because our work deserves somebody who understands that our children are the most vulnerable, and they need somebody who can stand up and speak up for them because this is definitely not for the faint of heart.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, I know [clearing throat] that Solnit-South gets a lot of attention. I actually I grew up and I still represent most of East Windsor, although I don’t -- no longer represent the portion of town that Solnit-North is located in, and -- and I understand that it might be
effort might be underway to try to reorganize the Solnit systems, both north and south, and I was just wondering what -- what’s happening with that?

VANNESSA DORANTES: Yeah, so I spent the whole day there yesterday, and I acknowledged the fact that my experience comes from an area office perspective, and one of the things that I think has to happen there is for those facilities, Solnit-North, Solnit-South, and formerly Riverview Hospital, to kind of take a look at the structures that are in place. One from the psychiatric medical model, the second from the PRTF, which South and North are, but then also to understand the overarching umbrella of DCF because it’s almost like it’s a very bifurcated system, and so for me to understand what happens there, they also have to understand the expectations of the larger DCF system, so I learned a lot yesterday and will be working with our administration to learn a little bit more and be able to give you more details on that, but I agree with you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): So, the intention is to -- to maintain the two campuses of the Solnit-North and Solnit-South going forward?

VANNESSA DORANTES: We -- we’re -- we -- there’s lots of considerations that can be a part of the dialogue.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Okay. Don’t put you on the spot then.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Less than 3 weeks in, and I appreciate, and -- and I was -- I just want to thank each and every one of your social workers and what
they do and everybody at DCF because it’s -- it’s a challenge. I understand that completely, and you’re dealing with some of the worst cases in society, and trying to help these children be lifted from those, and make --

VANNESSA DORANTES: And, our workers come every -- oh excuse me. I’m sorry.


VANNESSA DORANTES: Our -- our workers come to work every day thinking about the strengths of those families and the strengths of those communities because we understand that children thrive in functioning and happy families, and functioning happy families do well in resilient communities of which Connecticut has a ton of, and we’re excited to be a part of those communities; like I mentioned in my opening remarks, through our mobility and advances in our child welfare system. We look forward to being in communities a lot more. When I practiced this work, I did a lot of partnering with law enforcement and with schools, and we have to get back to that. We have to get back to the basics of seeing us as a part of the community and part of the continuum to help kids and families thrive, so I appreciate your thanks to the workforce, and they appreciate hearing that.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, thank you, and I appreciate your comments about the accountability and the need to make sure that moving forward that everything is done in the most efficient way but the most proper way for the children --

VANNESSA DORANTES: That’s right.
REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, the families, so I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you and God bless.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): One of the questions I was gonna ask you if you were going to be involved with the communities for children, for probate or education systems or law enforcement so kids don’t fall through the cracks. And, so often as you see and we see folks fall through the cracks, especially in urban areas, so you did - without me asking that, you’ve already said you plan on doing that and will that be a cultural approach to the whole DCF system?

VANNESSA DORANTES: I do believe that my position is unique because I came from within, and so far, the attention and the respect and the elation from our workforce because I am being nominated for the seat has been extremely positive, so I can only hope that the response to the direction I’d like to take the agency in will also be as positive. We all understand the complexities of the work that we do and we often refer to ourselves as part of a child welfare system and not the entire system, so it definitely what they will hear from me is the expectation is how are we that team member that helps everyone row in the same direction for -- for kids and families, so I’m excited to reignite some of those partnerships.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I’m excited to hear that. I think many of us don’t have hope, we need hope, and I -- I wish you all the best, and those folks from North Haven that work at DCF that spoke very highly of you.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): And, I have all the confidence in you and all the workers and thank you for what you do.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you very much.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): We have to keep that communication and really give people hope, and it’s up to us also, so thank you.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Agreed. Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. Representative Phipps, my vice-chair, do you have a question or a statement? You’ll pass? The -- well, there is no further comments or questions. I’d just like to add that having worked with social workers in my previous career as a leader of -- an educational leader of the public employees who work for the Hartford Board of Education, part of them were school social workers. Having had family in social work, I watched how sometimes trying to avoid going off the left side of the road some of these agencies would veer hard to the right and go off the right side of the road. If something terrible happened to a kid that was in foster care, then everybody said, no, keep the kids with the family. If something bad happened with family, no, put them back in foster care, and it was a zig-zag, and I really don’t think that’s the way public policy should be run.
VANNESSA DORANTES: I agree.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): I think that we have to get that middle course --

VANNESSA DORANTES: I agree.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): And, one tragedy, no matter how terrible, cannot determine, you know, our long-term plan. And, certainly, you know my -- my concern was always that the frontline workers not be scapegoated when tragedies like this occurred. I tell people if -- if the caseworker, the social worker, and I have a -- my -- my masters is in public administration, so I’m not -- I don’t have an MSW, but the UCON School of Social Work did designate me as a field supervisor, and I did work with many, many young people that were going into the profession, but my feeling has always been if -- if the caseworker conscientiously did the visits, the reports were there in the file, person made their recommendation to their supervisor with the best intent, supervisor made the best decisions, everybody involved tried to get the best information, took it seriously, then I don’t believe that any of those individuals should be held accountable for anything that may have happened. However, you know, I do believe that we have to come down hard on people who falsify reports and claim they’re doing visits --

VANNESSA DORANTES: I agree.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): And, are not doing the visits and are not taking their job seriously. I agree with my colleagues that, you know, an agency can’t run that way, so I want to congratulate you on being nominated by Governor Lamont for this important position. I know that, you know, that your past
experience shows that you’ve got the experience, the qualifications, the passion for the job, and certainly, the -- the academic background too, so I have one final question that I ask of all nominees before I let them go, and that is; is there anything in your background or your past that you believe might prove embarrassing to this committee, to the governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

VANNESSA DORANTES: No, sir.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, that concludes it. congratulations again.

VANNESSA DORANTES: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): We’ll take a few minute -- [applause]. We’ll reconvene in about 5 minutes.

The Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee is reconvening. Next item on our agenda is the third nominee, which is part of the House Resolution and final -- final nominee as part of a House Resolution, and that’s Commissioner -- Designated Commissioner Katherine Scharff-Dykes of West Hartford that has been nominated to be commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Is Katie here in the House? There she is. Before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand and tell us -- will you tell us the truth and nothing but the truth? Okay. Please take a seat, and now, we’ll allow you a few minutes for your introductory remarks.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Okay. Great. And, so Chairman Vargas and other members of the committee on Executive and Legislative Nominations, it’s such an honor and privilege to have been nominated by Governor Lamont to serve as the Commissioner of the
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. I am really grateful to the committee for the time today to speak to you about my interest in serving in this position.

I’ve had the privilege of serving in various roles at DEEP for several years. In 2012, I was appointed as DEEPs Deputy Commissioner for Energy and in that role, I helped to author our state’s first comprehensive energy strategy and integrated resource plans for our electric grid. As the deputy, I was also really fortunate to work with members of the General Assembly on landmark legislation that doubled Connecticut’s investment in energy efficiency and enabled historic procurements for renewable projects.

In 2016, I had the honor of being nominated and in 2017, confirmed as the Commissioner of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority or PURA, and during my time as PURA, I spearheaded docket on electric grid modernization and adaptation, integration of renewable energy resources. I was lead commissioner of rate cases and matters related to rate design. As the PURA chair, I also focused on succession planning and adapting PURAs organizational structure to an evolving utility sector by creating a dedicated electric sector unit and a licensing unit to help streamline PURAs interaction with non-utility businesses. This direct managerial experience was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it, and it prepared me well I think for the challenges that DEEP will be facing in the years to come with a workforce that is 20 percent smaller than a decade ago and facing the prospect that we may lose or see approximately 40 percent of our employees leaving state service by 2022.
Connecticut is best positioned to advance its Environmental and Energy Policy goals when we work together with neighboring states. I will bring to the DEEP commissioner role significant experience in regional collaboration. In my 6 years working in the state, I have served as the Connecticut representative to the New England States Committee on Electricity or NESCOE, where I’ve advanced regional collaboration on energy infrastructure and market rules that safeguard reliability, state public policy, and guard against high energy costs, and since 2015, I’ve also served as the chair and then the vice-chair of the board of directors of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which is a 9-state collaborative that is helping to reduce carbon emissions in our electric grid. As the RGGI chair, I was proud to secure a 9-state agreement to reduce carbon emissions in the power sector by another 30 percent by 2030.

At both DEEP and PURA, I have worked hard to advance our commitment to addressing climate change in the energy sector through the procurement and integration of clean energy resources and adaptation efforts so that our grid can withstand more severe weather and rising sea levels while also focusing just as importantly on the delivery of energy at the lowest possible cost to Connecticut families and businesses. I look forward to working just as hard to advance DEEPs emission and environmental quality and environmental conservation.

I’m the daughter of an environmental science teacher who took my siblings and I hiking, camping, and fishing from an early age, and after college, I spent several years in Mongolia tracing the wildlife trade and helping to support their new national park system before returning to Connecticut to attend law
school. As a legal advisor at the U.S. Department of Energy, I worked on nuclear waste disposal, transmission siting, and other issues, and as the Deputy General Counsel at the White House Counsel on Environmental Quality -- a role I had just before coming to Connecticut -- I assisted with the federal effort to streamline environmental reviews and permitting for large infrastructure projects, which is an experience that I will draw upon to make analogous processes at DEEP more efficient, transparent, and accessible. I am humbled and honored to have been nominated to lead the dedicated teams at DEEP who are advancing emission critical to today’s Connecticut residents as well as future generations to protect our air, water, flora, fauna, and land; to provide clean, safe, reliable, and affordable energy for our citizens; and to remain clean and safe state parks with opportunities for public education, recreation, and economic development in their host communities. DEEP has a significant role to play in making Connecticut a healthy, vibrant, affordable, and desirable place to live and work. There is exciting work to do in the years ahead. My priorities include modernizing our electric grid to accommodate and maximize the value from new clean energy resources, ensuring that our energy markets are providing a reliable resource mix reflecting our state’s broad clean energy policies, enabling information connectivity all across the state, reducing our vulnerability to climate variability and extreme weather events, providing fair and efficient permitting processes for those who seek to do business in our state while protecting and monitoring our air, land, water, flora, and fauna; supporting our under-representative communities and our most vulnerable residents by promoting environmental justice and
energy affordability; protecting Connecticut from the effects of federal rollbacks in environmental protection and fostering economic development by showcasing Connecticut’s parks, natural resources, and outdoor recreational opportunities that are the results of decades of environmental stewardship, so just a few things on the to-do list [chuckling], but what I strongly believe and -- and which really comes from my experience of the last several years serving in Connecticut is that DEEP will only be successful in advancing these goals when we work with partners, whether that’s other states, other agencies, municipalities, nonprofits, the private sector, but particularly the General Assembly. And, so I thank you for all of your support and for your time today, and I welcome any questions that you may have.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much Commissioner Dykes for that statement. Congratulations on being nominated by Governor Lamont for this important position, and I’ve heard -- well, you and I have had the opportunity to speak before, and the -- the only thing I’ve heard, the only concern I’ve heard is that people feel sometimes the department concentrates more on the energy issue than on the environmental issues. Do you have any thoughts on that?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, it’s a very broad agency, and you know, I’ve been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on the energy side for the last 6 years. That’s certainly the area that I -- that I know very well, but even in that work, so much of my efforts have been focused on what I call environmental issues, particularly how we address preparation for climate change both in reducing carb emissions and adapting to the impact of climate
change on our electric grid, but I’m very, very excited, you know, to return to some of the work that I had done prior to coming to Connecticut with respect to wildlife management issues, supporting parks, addressing environmental permitting and reviews, and my time in D.C., and we have a terrific team. They’ve already just in 3 weeks been working very hard to get me up to speed on all the issues in Environmental Quality and Conservation, and -- and I’m just thrilled to be working with them and working just as hard on that side of the agency.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Very good. I’ll open it now to the committee members and yes, our ranking member, Representative Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.


REP. PERILLO (113TH): One of the complaints I hear -- the complaint I hear more than anything else from municipalities, from private developers is about the permitting process and how long things can take. Walk -- walk us through, if you could, some of the steps that you’re interested in taking that can actually make it easier for municipalities and developers to redevelop contaminated properties and go through the other processes needed at DEEP?

KATIE SCHARFF–DYKES: Terrific. Well, I appreciate the question, and I will share with you that when I talked with Governor Lamont about this position, you may be pleased to hear that this is a high priority for him, that he said is an objective to ensure as part of his vision to help strengthen our economy in the state, that DEEP is front and foremost there and
prepared to provide a transparent and efficient process for permitting for those -- those types of activities. So, you know, we have a strong base to build on. DEEP has been at the forefront for the past few years in terms of lean permitting processes to identify those opportunities, to reduce redundant steps, to utilize information technology, and -- and online tools to streamline the process for receiving applications, and I fully intend to continue to build on that base of progress and -- and continue the improvement that DEEP can make in its role.

The -- we have, you know, within the Lamont administration, of course, you’re aware that the governor has established a chief operating officer. I think this is a trend that I’m excited to continue and mirror within our own agency with our chief of staff, who is actually going to be a chief of staff operations, and performance ensuring that we have strong metrics to track the turnaround times for all the variety, and there’s a huge variety of permits and environmental reviews that DEEP has jurisdiction over.

We have -- you know, the great bulk of permitting actions that PURA [Laughing] -- that DEEP undertakes are concluded within 90 days, right? And, so it’s, you know, understanding what is the right approach? How do we ensure that we got the resources focused in the -- to the greatest impact depending on the complexity of -- of those permits? Within the Brownfields Program, we expect to continue our strong partnership with the DECD. We have already since 2011 remediated about 3000 acres in the state, so ensuring that the funding is there, DEEP can provide the technical assistance. There’s so many reasons why it -- it’s in our interest to continue to work with the Brownfields working group and
municipalities to ensure that these properties can be returned to productive use, in part because they are located in areas where we -- we don’t have to -- you know, we can attract industry there. The infrastructure from the energy side is usually available from the transportation side, so these are very -- these are very great properties to return to use, and so making sure that we have the dollars and then the technical assistance trained on that objective to return them is -- is very important to me.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, and Brownfields is a great example. One -- one of the things that I do hear and that I’ve witnessed, unfortunately, repeatedly is you know it’s the last day before the deadline is due when the permit is -- is granted, and you know, the applicant gets a request for additional information, and then the clock starts all over, and again --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Yes.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): And, again, and we’re here a year later and still nothing has happened. What steps can be taken to ensure that permits -- permit applications get reviewed early on in the process, deficiencies are identified and turned around, rather than, you know, it sit on the proverbial bottom of the pile --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Yes.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Until -- until the buzzer goes.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, I can tell you from my experience working at the federal level on streamlining permitting and environmental reviews,
all of the best outcomes, right, result from early engagement with an applicant, and so, you know, being able to flag quickly for an applicant if they have an incomplete application is a best practice that just is self--self-evident. I am very early in my time at DEEP. I know that we have a strong team here who’s been looking at how to improve these processes, but that is certainly a practice that--that I know well from my prior experience, and you know, we have a permit ombudsman at DEEP. For example, when we have a let’s say a business that’s coming in that’s going to need multiple permits, that’s another circumstance that can sometimes produce delays. Having one point of intake, someone who can make sure that we flagged for the applicant all of the different touch points that they may have with our jurisdictional programs. We may be able to address some of the different issues that the applicant is going to have from common base of material or information or data, and that can help with the efficiencies. Even better is when we can talk to a business before they have selected a parcel. If they’re choosing between different properties, we may be able to advise them. I just saw this happen last week with a business that contacted us. They were weighing, you know, two different locations. We were able to advise them on some of the remediation issues they may run into at one of the properties that they were looking at, and that helps them make a decision about early on in the process before they’ve made that settled investment about where they are going to have the best chance to move quickly through the permitting process, so there’s--there’s a long list of practices that we can utilize that they rely on, early engagement, early communication, and so that’s going to be very important to me. I had the
opportunity in my first week on the job to meet with the CBIAs Energy and Environment group. It was a terrific discussion. I brought my legal pad. I, you know, wrote down a lot of suggestions. I hope to have a listening tour to talk with all of the chambers and other business groups, and you know, I look forward to suggestions from members of the assembly about how we can get the word out to those who are going to be coming before our agency so that we can have an open door and -- and let them know how to reach us, and so that we can be a partner. Because, again, you know, I don’t see or environmental -- our commitments to environmental protection to a safe and healthy environment as intention with economic development. I think they are actually the basis for having a thriving economy, but it all rests on the confidence that everyone has in the process that’s necessary to ensure that we -- businesses can grow at the same time that we’re -- we’re addressing those safeguards, and so that’s something I’m going to be very keenly focused on at my time at DEEP.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Well, I wish you luck with that. You know, you’ve got municipalities that are eager to move along with -- with parcels. You’ve got private developers who are eager to get, you know, shovels in the ground, and you’re now running an agency that has a lot of institutional inertia where employees -- I would argue -- don’t necessarily see themselves as partners. They see themselves as obstacles. That’s been my observation, maybe I’m wrong, but I wish you luck in -- in changing the direction of that. I think it would be good for the state, especially those communities that have contaminated parcels. Just one last thing. It -- it came to my attention that
there was -- and I’m sure you’re aware of it -- concerns about a conflict of interest with you, and I -- I’ve seen the letter from the Office of State Ethics. It looks great, but I just wanted to give you the opportunity to --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Please.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Get that on the record that it’s resolved and not -- not a problem.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Thank you so much for that opportunity, and -- and so just for the benefit of the committee as I serve -- would be serving in this role as the Commissioner of DEEP, my husband he actually was hired through a competitive process of the Connecticut Green Bank before I began my state service. He serves as the vice-president of the commercial, industrial, and constitutional programs at the Green Bank, and DEEP has some intersections. My role as commissioner has some -- some of the actions that we undertake has some intersection with the Green Bank. I can name a few of them that the DEEP commissioner sits by designation on the board of directors of the Green Bank. We occasionally, through the Lead by Example program, for which the state is endeavoring to install clean energy facilities and energy efficiency improvements in state buildings, occasionally enters into transactions with the -- with the Green Bank that my husband would be involved in. With respect to those two activities, I have already proactively put in place delegation and recusal so that our deputy commissioner for energy, Mary Soto [phonetic], will be handling all of those matters, and I will have no communication with her with respect to any of the actions she would undertake as a member of the board of the Green Bank or with respect to specific
transactions that the Green Bank or my husband would be involved in. This is an issue that I take very seriously. I have sought the -- practically sought the guidance of the Office of the State Ethics not only in this process of confirmation for DEEP but also in my prior role serving as the chair of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority. The Office of State Ethics issued a formal advisory opinion two years ago when I began at PURA that clarified that -- and I think it’s helpful perhaps to the committee that I summarize that with respect to the Green Bank, because the Green Bank itself is not considered a business under state law, they are a public agency, that I may take official action in my role as the DEEP commissioner with respect to say energy policy issues. I'm sorry. That opinion was respect to my role as a PURA commissioner but taking action that would affect the financial interest of the Green Bank because they are not a business, and it laid out certain mitigation steps and recusals that I could take to avoid any financial interest or benefit to my husband, so I have received an informal letter from the Office of State Ethics. I will be also requesting a formal advisory opinion from the Ethics board as well, which I will be pleased to share with the committee as soon as we obtain that, and -- but I expect to -- this is something I take very seriously. I certainly would not want to be in a position in it’s important role to be in any violation, whether actual or perceived with our ethics rules with respect to financial interest, and I appreciate the question because it’s important to me to be fully transparent about the measures that I’ve taken with the Ethics office as guidance to ensure that that’s not the case.
REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thanks, and like I said, I asked the question to give you the opportunity rather than me jumble it and get it all wrong.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: [Laughing].

REP. PERILLO (113TH): You know it better than I do, so I appreciate that and best of luck.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yes, Senator Formica, you have the floor.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Commissioner.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Good afternoon, Senator.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Nice to see you again. Congratulations --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Always a pleasure.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): On your appointment.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Thank you.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): You and I have had the great pleasure of working together in I think both of your roles --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: [Laughing].

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Over the last few years, and I’ve always found you to -- you know, to be on point and involved and knowledgeable and you know, of great intellect, so I think the governor has made a great appointment with regard to that. There are, however, some policy issues that you and I may differ on, and I’d like to talk a little bit about one question with regard to conflict while we’re on it. We’ll start with that. You were at DEEP. You
were at PURA. You’re back at DEEP. You’re creating policy that you’re regulating that now you’re gonna create policy. Are there any conflicts that may have occurred in that process just by the natural order of things?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Changing uniforms?

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Yes.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, thank you for the question, and I also want to say thank you for your partnership over the last several years and your leadership on -- on some of the really critical energy issues that we’ve been facing in this state on the Energy and Technology Committee. I think your question goes to whether there will be any conflict of interest or recusals necessary with respect to serving as the DEEP commissioner and working on issues that may have come before me when I was at PURA? Is that a good summary?

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): And even one step behind that, that you may have worked on as DEEP --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Back in the DEEP role.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Commissioner of Energy or whatever, you know.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: [Laughing] Right, so I think the key here and I, upon learning about the prospect of this appointment, I consulted both with our legal counsel at PURA as well as on the DEEP side to ensure that I was getting the benefit of their viewpoints about what recusals may be necessary, so I’ll just speak to the question starting with PURA where there are a number of -- there are always patients on the operating table of course [Laughing] when you step away and the question is could I be
involved on -- in my DEEP role on matters that were pending while I was at PURA, and the answer that I’m -- I’m following is with respect to any contested matter that PURA was adjudicating and in which I was involved at PURA, I will not be participating or guiding any decision making or communicating with the staff at DEEP who are working on those matters, but that’s with respect to open, unresolved, contested proceedings. So, for example, we have a grid modernization proceeding on -- at PURA. It’s not a contested matter and the ex parte rules were waived in that proceeding, so that would be different than say -- and so I don’t see a bar for participating in that proceeding as it -- as it continues at PURA. With respect to the implementation of Public Act 1850 or Senate Bill 9 or the Net metering issue, depending on how you determine it, that is an example of the type of contested matter that I was involved in at PURA, and in which I am not communicating with our -- our policy bureau staff in the positions that they’re taking at PURA in that ongoing proceeding. That does not preclude me from having conversations with the legislature to the extent that I understand that topic is maybe revived this session in a legislative context about the future of Net metering, but it’s helpful perhaps just to clarify since we are here at the LOB. That is an example of something that I won’t be participating in the PURA adjudication.

Your other, I think, the part of your questions relates to matters that I would have worked on at -- as the Deputy Commissioner for Energy prior to going to PURA and then coming back to DEEP, and I’m not aware of any recusals that would be necessary in that regard, but I’m always happy to get this question. It’s been some quick changes here [Laughing] over
the last few years, and -- and happy to be upfront and transparent with folks about the legal advice I’ve been getting on what I can participate and what I can’t.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you. You know, there is the opportunity to do so, changing uniforms and what happens, and you know, the law of unattended consequences are always kind of rears its head sometimes, so I just wanted to make sure that you were aware, and you seem very aware of it. As far as the SB 9 and the, you know, I hate section 7 Bill --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: [Laughing].

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): You know, we can talk about that, you know, moving -- moving forward.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: I -- I think we’ll have that opportunity.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Yeah, I think so too. With regard to your role -- and Representative Perillo touched a little bit on it -- permitting and -- and staffing; do you have any thoughts about operational organization or reorganization with regard to the department, and -- and I ask that coming from a first selectman’s position where I came in and inherited an agency with much smaller than yours --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: [Laughing].

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): But, still an operating agency full of people and processes that were going on, and you know, one of the -- one of the opportunities I took was to kind of ask for them to return some of the budgeted money that they have, 1 to 2 percent every year in the hopes that I would empower them to, you know, to kind of do better as
you move down into the -- into the agency, and I found great success at that. People were actually -- department is returning 10 percent of money unspent because the people in the agencies operation they were -- were -- were working to involve themselves, and they see that same opportunity in government. You have a huge organization, and I’m just wondering your thoughts on positions and reorganization and if you’ve had time to consider that or where -- where you think you might take that?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, it’s a great question, and as I mentioned, I really have enjoyed the management experiences that I’ve had at PURA, for example. You know, you really have to look at the industry that you’re regulating and try to make sure that where you are allocating your resources, your precious, precious resources of staff time and that -- that you’re doing so to have the greatest impact of where you need to. You know, I do think that we have a strong team. Representative Perillo’s characterization that I -- I think that our team -- that they do see themselves as partners. They care deeply about maintaining high-quality environmental standards and -- and helping to be good communicators with applicants. We have a -- a significant challenge -- just to be frank -- that we’ve seen the -- the size of our workforce shrink dramatically over the last decade, 20 to 30 percent. We’ve -- we’re losing a lot of seasoned employees with a lot of knowledge, and that can add to the complications of ensuring efficient permitting processes and reviews being turned around.

The other dynamic of that, of course, is that we don’t lose employees uniformly across every program, and so those retirements, those departures, the
weight of that may be boring more heavily in certain programs than others and of course, when that happens, then you have fewer employees left to shoulder the workload of -- of many who have departed. I think my approach to management is first to sit down with each of the teams and figure out what are our objectives? What are we trying to -- you know, what is the value? What does success look like? Where do we want to be in 2 years, in 4 years, right? In terms of delivering on our mission and our mission across the agencies, and then looking at how are we currently approaching that? Do we have the right resources available? Sometimes it may be, as you say, reallocating staff or being able to collaborate among different units or see the overlap between -- you know, we certainly don’t have the luxury of having any duplication across our teams, and that’s very important to me to make sure that doesn’t occur, but I think the challenge that we face is not necessarily -- you know there may be opportunities for us to -- we’ve been doing a lot more with less [Laughing], and the challenge now is to really with the benefit of metrics, understand okay how many, for example, permits are we able to process per FTE? Right? Where what is the value from those different steps in the processes. You know, these types of permits, look at the level of complexity, for example, so that we can be more transparent with -- with our -- our budget offices, with the governor’s office, and with our regulated community about how we’re allocating those resources to ensure that we can maintain our mission of safe -- you know, a safe, healthy environment that in a way that’s providing predictable and efficient turnaround times on applications for businesses.
SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Okay. Thank you. In terms of a couple of other policies, one in particular that I found myself in the middle of was the Seaside Property there, and you know, over a number of years back and forth of whether you save the buildings or you don’t save the buildings, whether you repurpose the building or repurpose the property and what do you do, and then last session the whole conversation with, you know, what do we do? Do we bring in private people or don’t bring in private people? And, the agency embarked on a -- a process that seemed to be what the town had done some years ago, and it kind of took over that and said, we’re gonna go out to RFP or RFQ and where are we, and they set a deadline for -- for that, and the deadline came and the agency said, we’re gonna extend this “for the good of the state,” I believe, and then nothing ever happened. It -- it kind of just fell into some of those places where paperwork goes in this building where you never find it again, and I’m just wondering two things on that. I’d love to know where we are with that process with this particular property because I think somebody’s gonna get hurt if we don’t do something with those buildings, and two, it’s an asset that -- that needs to be utilized but more importantly the -- the process from the agency to kind of more or less disregard the process from the agency that I found troubling. And, I’m wondering if you can kind of give us some update on where we are with that and if you were to change some -- some of those processes?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, I hear your question a lot of concern around the potential for duplication and -- and -- and at the end of the day wanting some certainty about where things are going. I -- I can say that I have gotten many, many briefings over the
last 2 weeks. My staff has endeavored to try to update me on everything that DEEP does, and I can’t say that I’ve been able to absorb [Laughing] all of that information even though they’ve tried very hard, so this is one that I commit that I will get up to speed on very quickly, and look forward to having communication with you as quickly as possible to be able to provide that status. I understand that with regard to a pending RFP I -- I can’t recall the specifics of what I can and can’t share in a public forum, but certainly, what you’ve asked for in terms of a status update is something that we can provide, and I’d love to do that very quickly.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Perfect. Thank you. And -- and I know that you’ll be looking at agency -- agency operation with regard to commitments that it makes as we move forward. The -- the other thing you’ve talked in your opening statement about, you know, regional collaboration and modernizing the grid, and reliable resource mix, and -- and with regard to energy policy moving forward. You and I, again, have worked quite a bit on this. I think that, you know, I found my -- my way learning about this. This was a tough learn -- this whole energy gig -- and -- and coming in as a first-year Senator with the largest generator in New England, in my district, I felt it was important to get up to speed, and as we did, you know, I -- I understood that everything is really connected with regard to energy, and you and I have had some long discussions and debates on policy and crafting some bills that I think move the energy policy of the state of Connecticut forward with regard to some RFPs that we talked about, try to get more gas -- natural gas here. We’ve talked about RFPs with regard to, you know, renewables, and then we talked about and
implemented RFPs with regard to carbon-free, and -- and all of those are moving, and I’ve said often that you know preserving our baseload is the bridge to a renewable future -- section 7 aside, we’ll -- we’ll leave all that, but we have to change the utility model number one from a one-way to a two-way in a lot of ways. We -- we have to upgrade that whole philosophy on how that business model works, but we also have to make sure that we finish what we started, and if you could kind of talk a little bit about that -- the forward moving of the renewables and the fuel cells and the nuclear as we get into the next -- next step.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, it’s a terrific question and one that continues a conversation that I know we have been having for many years, and I appreciate your leader -- [laughing] for 4 years, and I appreciate your leadership, and frankly, the legislature’s leadership in bringing forward bills that authorized the department to act proactively to try to address the issue of premature retirements that baseload nuclear resources, among other things. These Millstone power plant in your district are significant not just to Southeastern Connecticut but to the entire New England region, and we, from a both a carbon perspective where we concluded that -- the premature retirement of those units would increase regional emissions of carbon greenhouse gases by 30 percent, and not just Connecticut, but for the entire New England region, and I was very troubled as well to see the ICE of New England conclude almost 2 years ago now in a report that if those units were to retire they would be the -- the grid operator would be unable to continue to operate the grid reliably during periods of weather like we just had last week when the gas pipelines are fully
subscribed to keep the heat on in homes and buildings.

So with that in mind, I can assure you that not only myself but the governor, Governor Lamont, has been very personally focused and his team very focused on this time-urgent question of how to address the future of the Millstone units, which were selected to continue in contract negotiations with the utilities, and its -- everyone understands the urgency of that question, and I see an important role in the many conversations that the committee had -- the ENT committee, Energy and Technology Committee had about moving forward a bill to authorize such procurement. I think there was a vision there of a -- an arrangement that would provide stabilization for those units, but also significant benefits for the rate payers of Connecticut, and I think that everyone in this administration is trained on making sure that that vision is actually realized in whatever contract may be brought forward to the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, and so that -- there’s no task that’s getting -- you know the tire on the lift for these next few weeks, and to address that question.

But, beyond baseload nuclear, you’re asking about, you know, what is this future of -- of our grid? We have carbon mitigation goals, which will -- we will only meet by ensuring continued deployment of clean energy resources and a portfolio of clean energy resources. I think some of the best news that I’ve seen in the last 2 years as the federal government as retreated from addressing this existential threat to civilization has been around seeing some of the how the economy and the markets have responded. For example, offshore wind, which can be a big economic development driver for our ports for the state of
Connecticut. We’ve seen those prices coming down precipitously, and -- and we’ve seen states in our region joining with us on deploying and securing contracts to ensure that we can take advantage of resources like that, so that coupled with the falling cost of solar, and other types of resources, you know, presents a huge opportunity. I see it as -- as a -- as a responsibility for the department as well as PURA on both of us to ensure that as Connecticut is making its investments that we’re doing so in a way that maximizing the benefits that all of the rate payers of the state are getting from those investments, and minimizes the costs that we’re having to pay for them, and there’s a whole variety of different tools that we can use to do so whether it’s grid modernization, using competitive procurement, and everything in-between, and that’s an agenda I -- I’m looking forward to continuing to work on through our energy branch.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you. It’s interest -- it’s interesting that we talk about, you know. Certainly, I commend the governor for being involved as you say not only in the, you know, the baseload conversation but the offshore wind conversation, and you know, he and I have had conversations about New London and the future of offshore wind, and you know, we’re talking about 300 megawatts or potentially a bill this morning, you know, was -- was on our agenda in energy to, you know, to raise something about, you know, a much larger procurement opportunity for offshore wind as we move to match things in New York. But, those 300 megawatts that we have now will yield us half or better of that, and you know, we have to be mindful I think as we move forward into the next generation of the timing. Certainly, we did the renewable portfolio standard.
We increased that opportunity by what 2030 to 40 percent, so we got to kind of get a move on, but it takes time to do these, and it’s important when you have an at-risk facility to make sure that there are other factors that are considered with regard to employment and economic impact as well as you know kind of like the value of solar that we talked about. How do you -- how do you identify that?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Correct.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Until you have a spiderweb, so I’m happy that’s a -- something that you’re focusing on and that we need to kind of move forward and resolve, you know, very quickly because I do believe the future is renewables, but I think it’s going to be tough to get that by 2030, just at the rate of construction and moving over. I’m heavily involved in the London, so I agree that grid scale solar and wind and offshore are all opportunities that we need to move forward with, timing is of the essence, and we have an onshore wind project now, I believe, with a, you know, plus 11 cent power purchase agreement. You know, we have offshore winds that might be better than half that, and -- and some of these other opportunities are still way below that when the standard service for our resource is 10.5 cents or 10.37, whatever it is, so. So, it’s a complicated issue. I don’t know all of the answers, but I’m happy to work with our committee and to work with you on, you know, moving -- moving some of these very difficult question forward, and I’ll take you at your word that this is -- this is a priority that we’re gonna take under advisement, and I have -- as I said -- spoken with the governor, and I believe he feels the same, so thank you very much for your time today and for your
-- your hard work to get you into this position. It’s well deserved.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Oh, thank you very much, and I look forward to working with you, Senator.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Formica. Any other member of the committee that would like to make a statement or ask a question? All right. My vice-chair, Representative Phipps, you have the floor.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I want to say congratulations on the nomination. In the spirit of brevity once again, I’ll -- I’ll be quick. I’ll -- usually, I would ask questions about communication and outreach and equity, but I just wanted to share a quick story about those questions, and I -- as we met yesterday, and I am 100 percent confident that equity -- an equitable lens will be the driver for your work and also outreach, and how do I know? You referred me to a service that could help save money, help make sure that our environment is protected, and knowing that you were taking it as a one-to-one time and already thinking about those issues, I have great confidence you will do a great job, so I just wanted to say congratulations. I’m looking forward to continuing working with you.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Oh, thank you, and good luck with that home energy audit. [Laughing].

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps, and any -- no further questions? Oh, yes, Representative Davis, you have the floor.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner, for being here,
and like Senator Formica, I’m bouncing back and forth from Energy to here, so very familiar with you, and thank you for our service to the state of Connecticut so far. My question is -- is more geared towards what I hear constantly from constituents, and actually, I have a couple letters sitting upstairs that need my reply about the -- their utility rates --

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Okay.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, how they continue to keep going up and explanation -- and it’s difficult to explain to them often times as to how is it that these utilities are able to come back and ask for more and more while they have large profits each year, and I understand, and I am very much a capitalist, but the PURA is in place because they are a public utility, and we do highly regulate them and regulate their rates, and -- and what -- and I know that the charge of DEEP in general is to lower energy cost for rate pairs in the state of Connecticut. I know PURA is explicitly charged with that. What kind of assurances can we give to our constituent that -- that rates are kept in check or -- or actually actively brought down under your administration?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Well, I really appreciate the question, Representative, and I have to say that when you’ve been a utility commissioner where it’s -- you know, the difference -- or the distance between something -- you know, charges going up on somebody’s bill is just contingent on a vote that you have to take, and you’re -- you’re the one in-between, you know, that occurring. It’s a very weighty responsibility, and every time we have a rate case proposal, an application from the
utilities -- distribution utilities to increase their rates, we always conduct public hearings in a number of the communities where those customers are located, and that’s the experience that you take back to the conference table when you’re talking with the staff about what to do and what to improve. Because when you hear from customers who are, you know, heating their homes with electricity, baseboard heating, and they’re living in one room of their house because it’s cold outside and they can’t afford the bill, when you hear about the impacts, you know, someone having to choose between filling a prescription or paying their light bill, these are -- it brings into stark reality that the consequences of the decisions that we’re making at a very high level around what to authorize as far as the utilities investment. I believe very strongly that -- well, first off, we have a number of different drivers that are impacting the price that we’re paying for electricity, and I’m speaking to electricity now. Obviously, there are other utility services that PURA regulates or that DEEP has some regulatory oversight over. You know, we have aging infrastructure. A lot of our distribution grid was built in the 60s and 70s at a period of rapid expansion and is now coming to the end of its useful life, and so what’s the strategy for how and when those services are being upgraded. We have impacts of more increase -- increase intense storms -- storm events of increased frequency and intensity, and that, I believe, is the result of you know what we’re seeing in terms of climate change impact here in our state. It’s particularly troubling with respect to, you know, impacts along the shoreline in terms of services needed or infrastructure needed for reliability that may be affected by sea level rise, but in Ellington and other areas, you know, we
have a lot of trees. A lot of vegetation in this state, and that is -- it’s doesn’t -- it’s not like -- it’s not complicated. Tree branches, you know, freeze, they fall down, they fall on the wires, and -- and that we have to send crews out to repair them, so those costs can be significant, and it’s important that the utilities are adequately budgeting, especially in this dynamic environment with climate change occurring for what they are going to be meeting in order to maintain the system reliability.

We also have other charges that are going on the distribution bill that for public policy programs including energy efficiency and renewable programs to help us address things like climate change, and so -- and another contributor to what you’re paying in distribution rates relates to the cost [Laughing] -- you can see how this is all gonna come around -- of paying the bills, socializing the cost of bills for customers who can no longer afford to pay, so we have to get costs under control because otherwise we’re ending up seeing those costs for hardship customers in those programs to ensure affordability starting to push up on the -- the rates that individual customers are having to pay. And, so my view is we can’t stop investing in reliability, and we can’t stop investing in reducing carbon emissions because of the cost of adaptation are going to be, you know, multiplied so much more greatly if we don’t take action to reduce carbon emissions, but with those investments that they were making in those types of programs, as regulators, as policy makers, we have to step back and ask ourselves are we getting the maximum benefit that we can from that program so we can help reduce costs? For example, for those customers who are having challenges paying
their bills, are we prioritizing getting weatherization measures and efficiency measures to those folks so that they have a better likelihood of being able to pay their bill on time so that that’s not spread to other customers, for example, and those are the kinds of things that you, you know, knowing sort of the insides and you know, and out of -- of what goes into rate making I think will put me in advantage in this position to make sure that we’re looking through every charge on the bill and making sure that there’s no duplication.

At the end of the day, some of this stuff sounds complex, but it’s not really rocket science. Like if you’re paying twice for the same thing, that’s not good policy, right? And, if you’re paying something -- for something and you’re not getting it, that’s not good policy, and you know, there are opportunities I know that we have to avoid doing that in the future, and that’s what I’ll be working hard to -- to advance.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): In your previous roles as deputy, you helped oversee the combination of what became PURA into what now is DEEP, at that time, and then you served in the role as the chairman of the authority. Do you see benefits to it being under the offices of DEEP and rather than a stand-alone agency as a regulatory agency rather than being in with DEEP, which is more the policy side of things?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: I feel that I’m uniquely qualified actually to speak to that question [laughing] having served on both sides. I do see a lot of benefits. Some of them go to -- for example, Senator Formica’s comment on where we’ve been able to merge some of our back office services and show, for example, that we can work off of a common IT
system that will streamline e-filing, for example, both for PURA as well as other parts of DEEP. There are many examples where also having, you know, a head count where we can assign staff to assist and to be decisional to one side of the agency or the other if necessary, if additional hands are needed. That gives us some flexibility too within a time of working with more limited resources, but I can also assure you, and -- and this comes, you know, very deeply from my time at PURA that PURA has to be independent when exercising a adjudicatory role. That benefits DEEP. That benefits everyone in the state of Connecticut to ensure that when they’re going before the three commissioners of PURA they’re getting a fresh hearing. They’re getting an independent hearing. They’re getting a careful and a thorough hearing of an issue, and there’s no -- no bias or prejudgment as a result of the orb chart that PURA sits within. I feel very confident that we’ve arrived at that structure. I -- I felt very comfortable as a PURA commissioner that my -- I heard arguments from the consumer counsel, the attorney general, the utilities, and DEEP, and we gave equal weight to all of those arguments as necessary. I -- I -- so I will continue in my role as the DEEP commissioner to ensure that PURA is independent in that -- in that role. I fought hard to make sure that PURA would have its own legal director, for example, because -- to ensure that those communications between PURAs lawyers and their commissioners are adequately informed and -- and protected by attorney/client privilege and so I -- I feel good about my time at PURA, that I’ve been able to strengthen it as a -- as an independent agency within -- in its function within this broader combined structure.
REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, and I appreciate that response because that is my concern about the independency of -- of PURA and making those decisions when decisions on especially rates that impact every single one of us here in Connecticut, businesses and individuals that it’s not being made on -- decisions being made above them on policy saying prove these rates, you know, or -- or you know, have a -- have a more willing eye to -- to approve those rates going forward. So, it -- I feel better that your confidence that you’ll be able to keep that independent aspect of PURA moving forward and -- and the idea that although you are under DEEP you’re still making independent decisions outside of what the policy pressures might be from the administration, so I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Any other members of the committee wishing to ask a question or make or say any remarks, or? No. Okay. Well, you know as we were saying at the beginning of the hearing, you know, the issue of balance between energy and environment.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: [Laughing].

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): That -- that is -- it’s -- in my district, that’s been an issue too with the trashed energy plant and many of -- not only for health issues but also, I believe the city of Hartford could gain a lot of acreage there if -- if that plant were relocated. I don’t know how realistic that is, but you know, I’ve gotten an earful about that too, so things to, you know, keep in the back of your mind as you enter into this new challenging position, and I congratulate you again for the governor’s appointment. And, if there are
no further questions, there is one last question that I ask of all nominees, and that is; is there anything in your past that would prove embarrassing to this committee, to the governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: No, sir.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much for coming before us.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: Thank you for this opportunity.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): All right.

KATIE SCHARFF-DYKES: I appreciate your time.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Let’s take 3 minutes. We’ll put the committee at ease for 3 minutes for a stretch and be back for our next nominee.

I’m hereby reconvening the Executive Nominations Committee. We have two more nominees before us, both are Senate Resolutions. The first one before us is Mr. James Rovella of Old Saybrook, Connecticut to be Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. Before you take a seat, please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth? Okay. Please be seated, and the floor is yours.

JAMES ROVELLA: [Technical difficulty] Well, good afternoon. I appreciate this opportunity [mic not on]. I do have a lot to say today. I look forward to entertaining questions. So, I supplied some written testimony to you folks and along with a resume, but I think the -- what’s in-between the lines is probably the most important. Good afternoon. I lead approximately 1638 employees at
the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, all of which are dedicated to serving the citizens of the state of Connecticut. Know the biggest unit is obviously the Connecticut State Police led by Colonel Mellekas, who is the new colonel there who has done a wonderful job of growing up through the organization. You know, I moved to Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and there’s quite a few people in there that are also the unsung heroes led by Deputy Commissioner Rush-Kittle, Bill Hackett, Brenda Bergeron, who are all there not only on the very, very bad days but they’re also there for the -- the weather-related events and serving the municipalities as we go. The Connecticut -- the lab -- it’s always known as the lab or Scientific Services led by Director Vallaro who has marshalled the silent witnesses in our criminal cases, right? We always look for those silent witnesses and is also going through quite a bit of revamping to fit within the budget. There are two teaching units’ divisions.

You know, there is never a substitute for training and bringing that experience to both law enforcement and to the fire service. Fire service training is led by Jeff Morrissette and Chief Flaherty over at POST. So, the 9-1-1 folks. Those are the folks you never hear about and never see, but you know when they answer the phone that’s the first interaction you have with public service. Those are led by Bill Youell.

So, just briefly about myself ladies and gentlemen. You’ll find I don’t -- I’m a man of few words and I’m humble, and I like to talk about the -- the work of these employees and the dangerous situations they’re put in rather than myself, but in order to provide you with a little background in preparation
for this job, I’m a product of South Catholic High School in Hartford. It’s no longer there, but I was working at the YMCA in downtown Hartford, and actually, was recruited to be a Hartford police officer and this is the way it went. A detective showed up one day and dropped an application and said, “This is what you’re gonna do and I’ll be back for it tomorrow.” There wasn’t a lot of choice there, but you know what, it worked out for me, it worked out for my family, and I began in the Hartford Police Department in 1981, and I walked some difficult areas in the city, both Park Street and Barber Street, and it began to refine how you speak to people and how you treat people with dignity and respect.

Later on, I went to be a detective in the Major Crimes Unit, and that’s where I really refined my ability to listen to folks on some of the most difficult situations going. I later I retired from the police department and went to the Chief State’s Attorney’s Office. I served in a couple different geographical districts in Hartford and Waterbury, along with the Office of the Chief State’s Attorney under John Bailey, under Kevin Kane, under Mr. Morano. I led the cold case units around the state and then became the chief inspector for the division which included several investigative units in my administrative duties.

In 2011, while still employed as the chief inspector, in July, I returned back to the city of Hartford to run the shooting taskforce for a reduction in those folks that are being shot. That was a successful program, but that’s where I first began with the breaking down of all the different silos I law enforcement, and learning that they all had to work together, and this is where the chief
often gets in trouble when he forgets somebody, but the Chief State’s Attorney’s Office was there, the Hartford Police, Windsor was there, West Hartford was there, Manchester was a steady partner, Probation and Parole, and all the federal organizations that came in. Let’s break down those silos and work collaboratively. The State’s Attorney’s also were imbedded into that unit and they did some great work in the city.

In February of 2012, I became the interim police chief in Hartford and later appointed to the position in September 2012, so those were some of the most dynamic times from 2012 until 2018 in law enforcement, not only in the city, but around the country; weren’t there? There was certainly unrest that we had to navigate. There was a transparency that we had to begin to show people, which is remarkable for law enforcement officers. They embraced it in Hartford and the community policing model lived. It still lives today, and that is the secret in law enforcement. It’s not just law enforcement. It is the community, and I’ll preach to that to anybody who likes to hear it.

We also began one of the -- the biggest crime centers in the nation, and it was built for the regional approach. It was built for the accumulation of intelligence and investigative knowledge, and it was also built to send that back out not only to the Hartford Police Department, its officers, but into the local municipalities. It relied heavily on technology and a camera program, and you will find you will hear this from me quite a bit, it relied on data. I’m a big data guy, so that tells the other side of the story.
So, in 2018, I did retire from the Hartford Police Department in February, and I had the, you know, what could be described as the best 8 months reconnecting with my two boys, my wife, my two daughter-in-laws, my granddaughter, and you know, any day now a grandson, so there were some good times in life. Married for 36 years, and then I decided I needed a new challenge in life. My friends from DEEP left already, but I became the colonel at -- for the Environmental Conservation Officers, and I was really looking forward to learning new tradecraft and how they did their job, and you know, in regards to your last question you’re gonna ask me, they gave me the scrub of my life [laughing], financially, socially, they decided I should have my fourth polygraph and psychological of which I passed, although there was some debate around my house about the psychological. My wife wanted as recount. [Laughter].

So, returning to law enforcement, I think it’s a passion. You don’t take that experience and you go home with it. What you do with it is it’s a service and -- and protection. That’s what we’ve lived by for almost 38 years now for myself in law enforcement, and I am looking forward to the challenges, but I can’t speak enough of good things about DESPP as it’s called, and the folks that work there, so thank you very much for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for your opening statement, and I can attest to your qualifications, to your experience, to your background having -- having seen you in action for so many years in Hartford and having participated in the community groups, especially the Maple Avenue Revitalization Group planners in Barry Square, and
seeing the great job you did in community partnerships, and I think that you’re eminently qualified for this position, and I can attest to all my colleagues that I have firsthand information about this gentleman, and I believe he’ll -- he’ll do a great job leading this department, which is so important to all of us here in Connecticut, so at this point, I will open it up to the committee. Yes, ranking member, Representative Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.

JAMES ROVELLA: Good afternoon.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): And, thanks for being here and congratulations.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you very much, sir.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): One of the things we hear about a lot in your agency is backlogs in terms of background checks. What are your thoughts on that? What are your plans to address it?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, in the -- in the first 3 weeks, I’ve had opportunity to visit most of the internal units, so background -- backlogs are a big issue, and you mentioned that specific area, and it’s also several different areas if I could just characterize a few others. You have a records backlog. You have an FOI backlog. You have a DNA backlog. You have backlogs with all sorts of different areas. Some of that is manpower. Other parts of that are process. And, those backlogs ripple through the community. For instance, background checks and specifically fingerprints, right, and they ripple through bus drivers. They ripple through childcare providers. They ripple and ripple and ripple. One area, the
area that we identified and freed up, were the boxing inspectors for mixed martial arts. They are gonna come along. They were approved because that ripples through not only the economy, but it ripples through the sport. Why can’t we have that in Connecticut, so that was a push to get those done.

So, my point is that our backlogs affect quite a few other people, so for instance, I walked in and saw the firearms people. They were at an 18,000-gun backlog, and then they went to work on it at my instructions. They got it down to 5000, but it crept back up to 16,000 and back down to 8000, so it could be a manpower issue there, but I think there is a technology issue there that we should address, that we can start to move along. It made mean that the guns are entered from the seller, and it may mean that we verify it on our end.

So, I want to look at the whole spectrum of the organization and the process and the work. So, those are the two areas, maybe some automation process and manpower.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Okay. Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Representative Yaccarino, you have the – oh.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you for allowing me to continue, Mr. Chairman.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, I -- [Crosstalk].

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Yeah, Representative Yaccarino is really excited to get in on this, I know.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): [Laughing]. Is this a tag team? [Laughter].
REP. PERILLO (113TH): We do this skit all the time. As a former police chief yourself, there have been a lot of proposals over the years here in this building, one of which is having to mandatorily show your pistol permit when stopped. What are your thoughts on that?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, that is one of the most challenging areas for a law enforcement officer, and let me describe that in just a little scenario for you. Law enforcement officer is working his regular daily routine, and he is approached by somebody that’s carrying a gun, and we teach during impartial policing not to make judgements about those folks before you get to those folks, but now, there could be a (inaudible - 03:40:46) issue here, a security issue, and I’d like to hear more from everybody else, but reasonableness would probably be the guiding factor here, so I’d encourage reasonableness when you decide those things.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Okay. So, that sort of addresses the question but not entirely. Do you believe that legislation should be passed in that area?

JAMES ROVELLA: I do believe so because it will also reduce arrests, needless arrests. For law enforcement officers coming up to -- up to folks carrying firearms and saying, hey, let me see your permit. No, I’m not going to show you my permit. It now becomes could be an alarm for people in a restaurant. It could be an alarm for people in businesses, but we need to simplify it, and that’s why I mentioned reasonableness.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Okay. Thank you. It is my understanding -- correct me if I’m wrong -- that within the agency we expect a number of retirements
among troopers. What are your thoughts on how to address that and any resulting manpower issues that could result?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, I was able to dig into attrition early on, and that is something that we addressed at the Hartford Police Department also, so we’re in the same boat. It’s almost like Groundhog Day when we start to look at the state police attrition versus the Hartford police attrition. You have the biggest attrition of your senior command. You have the biggest promotion of your junior command. You have the biggest hiring within the next 4 years of troopers, which means you may have young troopers teaching new troopers also. Technically, it could be a disaster -- a recipe for disaster, so we have to get on it now, which means 200 and almost 90 troopers down now. I expect to graduate 45 troopers. As we progress, I have asked for quite a few classes in the upcoming, and we have to manage what I could see as the cliff coming of over 400 troopers that could leave us by 2022.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): So, testing -- so, if I may? So, let’s talk about recruiting a little bit, which is where we -- you have to start this. We need to get out into the community colleges. We need to get out into the regular colleges, not only in in-state but out-of-state. We need to increase our minority and our -- our female ranks also. We’re at approximately 10 percent right now. In Hartford, we were up around 38 percent, and closer to 40 at times, so we need to do that, so recruiting is going to be a key issue. DAS is out of the testing business, meaning proctoring written tests, so the tests will be a little different moving forward. So, that we’re managing as we go. So, the recruiters, we may have folks that we’re gonna want
to hold onto. We will promote folks that want to have that chip card, that CHIP card, that Cooper Standards card, and you know, coming out of Hartford, I might leave folks in if they flunk the Coopers Agility Standard, which means you can only stay in until you can pass it. Realistically, is the colonel cannot sign off on anybody, per state statute, that doesn’t pass that. Let’s give these folks an opportunity to pass this Cooper Standard test. Let’s give them an opportunity to be a trooper. Then, begins your testing procedure. I have to shorten that time also because I’ve heard stories. In Hartford, we were at 14 months to make a police officer. I’m hearing stories, anecdotal, some cases that were at 16-17 months to make a trooper. That’s disturbing. That means some place along the lines the process is broken, and we need to fix that process and move troopers along. We may have to go to more than just one class. We may have to break up classes and use different facilities, so we’re preparing for that as we -- as we speak, but that’s not something that’s on the back burner. It’s right up front.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): So, when we talk -- it’s a good segway. When you talk about training, we’ve heard a lot about you know the firearms training needs of the agency, in specifically Griswold. What are your -- what are your plans as it stands right now? I know you’ve been here for a few weeks, but what are your plans to make sure that the needs of the department are met?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, a few weeks is -- is enough time to get going there. So, Griswold is out. The governor said that -- the governor and I sat down at the OC during the snowstorm. We talked about it a little bit, so the plan is we will be done with our
partner DAS, and I won’t exclude an indoor facility also. I am aware and the economy dictates that these big box stores are all going out of business, and there is going to be opportunities. Centrally located I would prefer, and I am also going to look at different opportunities to expand the POST range and be cooperative with other law enforcement agencies to borrow their range, so it’s on the table.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): [Crosstalk] Big box stores. That’s great.

JAMES ROVELLA: You know, they looked at me a little funny when I mentioned that, but it is really an indoor range and it may serve a different -- as long as it’s away from the public, it will be quiet in there, and it may serve another person with my emergency services in order to get a facility for those folks to park some of the bigger vehicles. You know, and I only want to go to a community that wants to -- wants to see a thousand troopers pass through their community and use their -- use their facilities, and have lunch there, and enjoy the safety of having a cruising run through. Visibility is important.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. As a former law enforcement officer for many years. What are your thoughts on recreational marijuana?

JAMES ROVELLA: [Laughing] Its time has come to -- you know, and we can go way back in time to 1981 when I sat in front of a board of commanders for my first interview, and I said, you know, we should be looking at a decriminalization of marijuana. So, that set aside, I also have to look at how it will affect the agency, right? What is the standard for operating under the influence? So, we’re gonna have
to look at that. Now, law enforcement officers carry guns, and everybody in my agency, the 1638, are also intrenched in public safety, so we’re gonna have to carve out their ability to use marijuana or -- or not, so there’s going to be some challenges.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Fair enough. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you for your time.

JAMES ROVELLA: You’re welcome, sir.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you good ranking member. The question I was going to ask, and I’ll follow up with friends with quite a few state troopers, and there is a declining population of our law enforcement, and we do have a better recruitment, drive and part of the reason is they’re at a middle age. The folks coming up, either it’s risky or the benefits aren’t the same as say 20 or 30 years ago, and I think you’ll be with us hopefully addressing some of those issues because we need a fluent number of officers, law enforcement locally and state, and I’m hope -- it just sounds like you’re on the right track, but we really need to be proactive.

JAMES ROVELLA: We really do. There’s no time to waste. I expect to test July time period, so we’re working with DAS to get that out, so recruiting is going to be short-lived. We got to really get out there and move around and publicly talk about the benefits of being a trooper, but you know, after 38 years, I’ll sit here and tell anybody I’d made the same decision over and over again. It’s been a
great rewarding experience, and that’s the experience we need to put out there. That, you know, not only the city and the state, they’ve taken care of me, they’ve taken care of my family and everything that goes with it since I began, and there’s no way that once you become a trooper that you’re ever gonna go back away from public service. You are stuck there, and you love it.

So, with that said though, these big classes were devised 20 years ago, right? Because the need was there, and now, they’re coming of age.

So, there are a few things that we’re talking about around the facility, but we’re hoping to have a class in place sometime around September.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): It’s the local PD seem to be more fluent. It’s the -- it’s at the state level position and I -- and I like again what I’ve heard is -- is the pensions changed, the risk is much greater, and the hours are totally different, and just something that I hear on the street. I’m not an officer but I do listen to a lot of my friends and folks, and I’m -- I’m glad you’re aware of it, but like I said, we have to address it. Another concern I’ve had since I’ve been up here starting my 9th year, is cyber security, and I think it’s something that we really need to address with Department of Public Safety and Connecticut Homeland with Federal Homeland Security. It’s a serious issue. It has crept up on us faster than I think people could imagine, and I would hope you -- you are going to have something in place with the stakeholders and all of us to protect as much as we possibly can.

JAMES ROVELLA: So, there’s already a cyber security unit, and there’s troopers imbedded in that unit,
but realistically, we have to look towards our federal partners also.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH):  Right.

JAMES ROVELLA:  We have to look to that area for not only their expertise, their training, and their equipment too, so when I say we’re moving silos, we have to partner in order to be effective.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH):  Well, I wish you all the best.  I’m a supporter, and thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH):  Thank you, Representative Yaccarino.  Any other members of the committee?  Yes, my neighboring state representative from the great city of West Hartford, Representative Joe Verrengia.  You have the floor.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH):  Thank you for that welcome, and welcome.

JAMES ROVELLA:  Thank you.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH):  It’s great to see you.  I just had a question around training.  You talk about the increase of recruit classes coming forward in the near future.  One thing that we did as a result in the legislature particularly and the Public Safety Committee looked at as a result of the recent controversial shootings that we’ve seen nationally, not here in Connecticut, but particularly nationally over the last 3 or 4 years.  We took a proactive approach, and we did a comprehensive review of police training here in Connecticut, and that was a taskforce.  It was made up of the various stakeholders, and we just completed that review less than a year ago, but what came out of hat review and what seems to be at the heart of the national debate
when it comes to training are two particular models. One is the military boot style -- boot camp style type of training, and the other is a more adult-based learning collegiate situational-type learning. I don’t necessarily think that it’s one or the other. I think maybe the answer lies somewhere in the middle. We’re -- we’re going to continue to look at this statewide, but I was just wondering if you had any initial thoughts on -- on this police training issue?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, right now the Connecticut state police are the traditional boot camp style, but very, very heavy on education and training in there also. Their academy actually runs a little longer than the municipal academies, and you’ll find for me -- I’ll take you back to Hartford, my state asset forfeiture money or my federal asset forfeiture money. Big, big chunks of that were used towards not only training folks but educating senior staff, so I’m a huge proponent of that. You did mention office involved shootings and -- and those are difficult, so the best office involved shooting is the one you don’t get involved in. It’s the one you had the training for strategic decisions before you get there, so you’re going to find I’m a huge proponent of training, training, training. I think it pays dividends in the end. You know, I think if you frontload your investment with training, your experience comes, and it pays dividends later on in life for us.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): Okay. And one thing that we found as a result of that comprehensive review is really how well the state of Connecticut are training their -- their police, and that’s really a tribute to the trainers throughout the state, but particularly at POST as well.
JAMES ROVELLA: POST does a great job down there you know with the municipal academies. There is also five -- five satellite academies, I believe, that are around the state that train officers also, and what’s important to remember is that it is standardized. That all the trainer -- that all the officers get the standard of training with the option to increase that at any time, so that’s important, yes.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): And, then one last thing and just to be interested in your thoughts. I know you’ve only been on the job 3 weeks, but we read a lot about youth and stolen cars and the lack of a consequence, and I know the police chiefs -- I’ve talked to a few myself -- and it’s a real challenge in dealing with, you know, particularly a group of juveniles, repeat offenders if you will, and the lack of a consequence and -- and danger that that creates, and I was just wondering if you had any comments of something?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, I did have some conversation with Senator Fasano about that. First of all, I’d like to see the data. I’d like to see if arrests are either increasing or decreasing in that area. Anecdotally, I’ll tell you what happened in Hartford. Some of my younger citizens would creep into the suburbs and steal a car that was most likely warming up, and take it for a ride, a joy ride. It was often traded when you got to the city, but I wasn’t seeing the stripping of cars that I saw 10-15 years ago. They were trading cars. They would often or try to get engaged with pursuits with police, which now policing is very, very difficult area -- pursue or not pursue because that becomes a weapon, right? And, that’s a two-ton weapon moving down the street at a high rate of speed for other
citizens, other law enforcements officers, or just pedestrians around, so that’s gonna be a difficult issue. I mentioned frontloading already. There has to be consequences because I’ll tell ya my officers in Hartford arrested these youngsters in these stolen cars. They would bring them home -- issue them their summons to appear in juvenile court, and the process would start, and before that -- before anything with their parents, they’d be out the back door, and that’s a revolving kind of door we don’t want to do, so I talked a little bit about frontloading. Frontloading is important to me because they need more services. They need some consequences, but with that, they need a lot more to go with it. I will tell you in my inner cities, in Hartford, single parents, lack of structure sometimes, so they’re behind the 8-ball to begin with, so there’s a lot to that conversation.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): And, thank you for those responses, and I -- I look forward to working with you going forward. Thank you.

JAMNES ROVELLA: Thank you. You too.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Verrengia. The chair recognizes Senator Witkos.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Chief, and congratulations on your nomination for commissioner of DESPP.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): A few questions and my first one is just a comment. I was glad to hear that you are looking for an alternative for a state police range for our troopers as we know Griswold is now off the table, but the -- as you know -- I’m sure
you’ve either been there before or heard about it, the current range in Simsbury is less than adequate for not only the troopers but the staff and -- and quite honestly the environment of how it’s kept and it continuously floods every year, just deplorable conditions, so I’d like that to be on your short list of tasks to accomplish -- is define something suitable for the men and women of the state police that deserve it.

JAMES ROVELLA: I agree.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): But I have a question about what’s your philosophy on fleet maintenance versus new purchase, and what are we doing? I understand our fleet is -- is aging rapidly and the mileage is really ramped up, and I know we’re under spending watch, if you will; so how do we address that?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, the fleets that is something we looked at -- I looked at fairly early and you know 1700 cars in the fleet, and the ones that I saw that were issued there’s quite a few that have some extraordinarily high mileage and need a replacement plan. How do we replace these vehicles in a timely manner, but also with the mileage comes the hours on the car, and that probably shows a better picture than just the mileage. So, every year, there are new cars that come online. Unfortunately, they come on slowly, so I have to work with the colonel and try to figure out a faster-paced way to bring these cars online and retire the older cars, and we I retire the older cars, they’re gonna tret out of the system, and let’s -- let’s get rid of them. Let’s not keep them hanging around, so that is all on the table, and I realize the importance of it. that’s their office. Unlike mine and yours, that is the trooper’s office.
SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Is there any reason why we don’t mark the cruisers that are used on the highways for routine patrol purposes because we’re always talking about, you know, constant presence and awareness, we don’t see that, but yet, when we see a cruiser during Christmas time, we always bring the marked car for that. Why haven’t we moved towards the patrol vehicles being marked?

JAMES ROVELLA: That isn’t something that I’ve actually looked at to date. Presence is important and having those cars out there they have a 24/7 use of those cars within reason, and it is marked with a lightbar when you see them, and it has sirens attached, so it’s something we can probably take a look at, but realistically, that has to be a discussion with the unions, right? When you discuss with the union, you discuss impact, potential impact to your union members, so it’s a discussion we could have, but realistically, it will be far down the road.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): What is the change in the working condition if they’re still allowed to utilize a vehicle 24/7 within reason by requiring markings to be put on there to more readily identify themselves as state troopers, like you said they already have the bars on the car? I just don’t understand, if you could explain that further?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, impact is decided by the actual union and the union members, what they think will be the impact. Management also has a much different view of it, so that’s the -- that’s the short answer to it.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Okay. And, one of the questions that comes up often for those of us that
represent a lot of the smaller communities is the resident trooper program, which all of our communities that have those love those, and I’d like to see those maintained and in some cases, even enhanced, but the cost of that program has gotten to be quite expensive, and I think part of it was -- is the state requiring the towns to pay double portions of certain of those costs. Now, some towns have -- we gave them the ability in this legislature to share a resident trooper, and I’d like to hear from you what your plans are to enhance the resident trooper program, maintain the status quo, or what can we do to help provide some relief to the cost to the towns that have them?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, the first part really there’s no plans on decreasing the resident trooper program. I don’t have enough knowledge yet to talk about the cost to the program, to the municipalities, but I am aware that law enforcement is expensive and the fringe to go along with it is expensive also, but it’s -- I’ll do more research on that.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Yes, because just really I think it’s a double billing on the fringe side of it, so I’d appreciate you look into that for me. The previous commissioners have gotten into office and have rushed to purchase equipment for the agency. Are there any plans in the immediate future that you see yourself asking your personnel to purchase, to enable, or provide for a better law enforcement opportunities for the men and women that serve under you?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, there is -- there is conversations about what they actually need. It revolves around mostly person power for the entire 6
different agencies. I haven’t opened up any series of discussions in depth at all about equipment.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): One of the often topic of discussions up here is regarding the officers with the Department of Motor Vehicles, and they like to be recognized on an even par with the state police, and the state police, while they’re union, has always come out strongly against that. I’m just curious if -- if you’ve had the opportunity to enter into any discussions with anybody in the agency or just be briefed on that past history?

JAMES ROVELLA: I have not.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): And, my last couple questions are -- are -- which I agree that community policing should be the way of law enforcement because I think that’s where you get your best tips and you build your best relationships, but you -- in your opening remark you had compared the Hartford PD to the state police in two different areas specifically about the length of training an officer and the minority representation in the two agencies, and it seemed to me that Hartford was in a better position or state than the state of Connecticut currently is in the department. And, so how would you address the unwritten, if you will, but perceived animosity between a municipal police department and the state police?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, in Hartford, I hope we didn’t share that. They were actually imbedded in a few different units, and we had officers from the city imbedded there too, but you know what, I don’t think it’s the animosity at all. It’s probably ego on both sides, and when we work together, those egos are checked at the door, and it’s nothing more than
work. I’m sure the Connecticut State Police will do that, and even local law enforcement will do that.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, and I hope that kind of continues, but it really starts from the top down when new folks are introduced into law enforcement, it’s when they’re with their peers, often times I’ve seen them act one way, but then when they’re separated into different groups, then they act a different way, and you know, everybody’s on the same team, so we should all act accordingly in my opinion. Well, you’ve answered my questions satisfactorily. I look forward to supporting your nomination. Thank you.

JAMES ROVELLA: And, I think you said it best, sir. We’re all on the same team.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Any further remarks? Yes, Representative Davis -- oh, Senator Formica and then Representative Davis.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have just a brief question as Senator Witkos went over my concerns with the resident trooper program. I, as first selectman in a resident trooper town, I had the great pleasure of working close with your agency for a number of years, and it’s a -- it’s a great organization and the resident trooper program is a great program. Touching just briefly again on the gun range issue. You know, you I think spoken on out-of-the-box solution, which --

JAMES ROVELLA: Yes.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): You know, is appropriate, but I’m curious about East David. The National Guard facility at East David has been there. We’ve toured that. It looked like it has everything.
It’s vacant a lot of the times. I understand there may be some people that are thinking that they don’t either want to share it or there’s too -- not enough time or not enough resources there to bring the 1100 or 1000 troopers down there on a timely basis. But, is there a way to incorporate East Haven as part of a plan where we might take a hybrid of what you suggest, perhaps -- I know we have a small range in Salem that accommodates 20 people or so -- could there be different ranges of a smaller size, utilize East Haven for what it has in that section, something in Danbury, something in Hartford, something in the eastern part instead of trying to put one range for $10-million dollars or $15-million dollars in the middle of -- in the middle of the state? Is that something that might make sense to look at?

JAMES ROVELLA: Well, what makes sense is we have options, and that’s important, whether it’s indoor, whether it’s outdoor, or whether it’s sharing like you said. The New Haven range did come up in one of the reports I read as an option, but it’s about availability also. How many days that they will use it versus the days we need, but it’s also about consistent training of the trooper that it is across the agency wide training, so they really need a facility of their own if they’re gonna run that volume of troopers through, but in the meantime, cooperation and these different coalitions we can build will certainly work.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Well, I appreciate your opportunity of think outside the box and to consider that option, and the rest of my questions have been asked already, so I appreciate it, and I look forward to serving with you and moving our great
state forward, so congratulations on your appointment.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you. I do the same.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Formica.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for being here. I hope it doesn’t feel like a fifth polygraph test.

JAMES ROVELLA: [Laughing] Well, I’d recommend one for everybody. [Laughing].

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Well, I know Representative Yaccarino’s questions were exceptionally hard on you, but.

JAMES ROVELLA: [Laughing].

REP. DAVIS (57TH): So, first of all, I want to thank you for your public service as someone who comes --

JAMES ROVELLA: You’re welcome.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): My brother’s a lieutenant in a local police department. My father-in-law was a detective for -- for many years in law enforcement, so that’s -- I appreciate deeply and -- and thank you for the many years of service both locally and to the state of Connecticut. A couple of points have already been hit on. I do represent a resident state trooper community, so I’m glad to hear that you want to see that program continue and improve it if at all possible. Some of the areas that -- that you would now be overseeing as the actual commissioner outside of necessarily the -- the
direct law enforcement of the state police is like the forensic crimes lab, and I know you mentioned on that, and I know you mentioned on that, and I know I think it was -- I think it was last year we passed legislation that was intended to improve that process because of the great backlog and then also the protocols as far as evidence gathering and chain of command of that evidence. Have you -- have you been involved in -- in anything going on over there yet? I know you just started a few weeks ago, but improvements that are being made? The backlog being cut down on? That protocol being put into place so that we can track the evidence more closely?

JAMES ROVELLA: Yeah, so in the 3 weeks I’ve been there, 3+ weeks, I’ve had an opportunity to meet with the directors, especially Director Vallero [phonetic], on a couple different occasions and traded emails with him back and forth. I did notice his backlog of not only DNA cases but some of the sex assault cases. He took the steps to subcontract out some of the sex assault cases to come into compliance with the spirit of the law that these be processed in 60 days, so we’re well on our way to that. When we looked at critical replacement of folks for his lab, they centered around some forensic sciences, which means DNA, so DNA -- that caseload is huge, and you may see it just from the cases that are made today or tomorrow, but that’s not where the caseload is. It’s all the backlog cases, all the unsolved cases, whether it be crime scene’s property or crime scene’s persons. There is a huge backlog there that doesn’t go away because technology changes so quickly, and it’s so minute in detection, so he’s got an interested case log. Yes, we want to attack that case backlog and dwindle it
down because we want to prevent somebody from -- if we have enough evidence to make an arrest early on, prevent that person from doing another crime.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And, is that a situation of lack of infrastructure or lack of technology available to the department to be able to process all of these things, or is it purely manpower, just not enough time in the day to get everything done?

JAMES ROVELLA: It’s certainly not the technology that is improving by leaps and bounds. The entire agency has been running very, very lean over the last 6, 7, 8 years, very lean, and be very -- they haven’t been able to refill the positions as before, and I understand that. It’s the economy, so we need to hit those landmines in life now to adjust those things going forward, so some of it’s, you know, Representative Perillo’s answers, some of its process, some of it is rehiring people to take care of these backlogs.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And some of the other areas that you oversee that isn’t talked about very much and maybe it shouldn’t be is the Homeland Security side of things and -- and I’ve always feared our location is -- could be a problem when it comes to terrorism and other Homeland Security based things because of the nuclear power plant here in the state, because we have the busiest commuter rail line in the country, and that has just been expanded up to from New Haven to Springfield. What steps do you see coming in to improve or enhance what we’re doing for Homeland Security in -- in the battle against potential terrorism?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, in this area, we speak in generalities, right? And, I’m more than willing to continue this conversation offline with you. So,
critical infrastructure and that’s what you’re describing. How do we protect the critical infrastructure of, you know, the intersection between Boston and New York, right? ‘Cause that’s us, and the highways that are in-between there, and that’s something that we do very quietly as you said, and we imbed people, so we have the good exchange of intelligence, and that intelligence makes it out very quickly, so let’s continue that.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Yeah, I don’t -- I’m not asking for any kind of details in any sense, but it’s just something that I want to make sure that we continue to keep in the forefront.

JAMES ROVELLA: We will.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): I’m sure you do, and then one final last question when we’re talking about the critical infrastructure, and I know your unit also looks at school security, and that’s something that we’re -- we’re talking about a lot and -- and on my role on the Bonding Committee, you know, that’s something that we take a look at a lot is what kind of improvements can be made to schools to -- to enhance their security and just curious on -- on your views and what can we do as a state to try to increase school security as we move forward?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, again, I’ll speak in generalities, and then we can talk a little more, so hardening of schools is definitely one way to go, but not discouraging making them so hard that we discourage the learning process that goes with it. It’s only as secure as the door that’s left open or your weakest point we call it, so we also have to get into -- for lack of a better word -- and it’s got a negative condemnation to it is profiling. How do we decide or why do we think we should be talking
about a child that’s been bullied, a child that has withdrawn, a child that may have access to weapons, a child that may act out, and then we’re into the frontload again. A huge investment into the frontload. Making teachers recognize these and passing it along to qualified people, so there’s a lot we could be doing to protect our most treasured assets.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. I would ask our two Senators to please stick around for a little longer if they can because the next two are Senate Resolution, so we’re gonna need your -- your presence of at least one of you to move these nominees forward. The -- if there’s no -- no -- there is questions. All right. Senator Hartley.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my apologies. It’s one of these days where we have meeting over meeting, but Mr. Commissioner, first of all, I want to thank you for appearing before us today and also contemplating your approval -- the mission that lies ahead for you, a critical agency for the state of Connecticut. In many ways, it’s the face of the state of Connecticut on public safety side and many times you’re asked to come in in very critical moments in the course of events here at the state. From a budgetary standpoint -- because I must confess, I have not been able to listen to the hearing -- and so I just wanted to ask you a question having worked on the Appropriations subcommittee for this agency for a number of years. If DESPP is contemplating or in the process of adopting the Kronos platform in terms of personnel, knowing that over time has been a critical issue
that we’ve been dealing with in the agency for a long time.

JAMES ROVELLA: So, I’ll step back into my previous role of chief. We adopted Kronos at the chief level in the Hartford Police Department, and we work with Kronos in different steps, and you know, most recently within the last 2 weeks, I have met with DAS and discussed Kronos, giving them a little more boots on the ground kind of these are some of the -- the things that we will face going forward and these how we prepare for it, but Kronos is coming. It’s an automated system, and we’ll work to bring that in.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): So, is there a timetable for the department in terms of adopting it and having it up and running?

JAMES ROVELLA: There is no timetable at this point, but I did tell DAS that I won’t be able to hand them a bunch of troopers to make that work. They have to come with their own consultants, their own infrastructure to implement it here, and I -- and I explained quite a few different levels that they are going to experience.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Okay. So, that’s to be continued?

JAMES ROVELLA: Yes.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): And, then one of the other issues that we have strove to work for is to try to ensure that we have hazardous duty personnel doing hazardous duty as opposed to doing nonhazardous duty, so I’m just -- and we spent a lot of time on that over the years. We had a committee previously known as Program Review and Investigation, which
helped us to get our arms around it and so forth, and I just share that with you in terms of, you know, how we continue to move forward.

JAMES ROVELLA: I appreciate that and that is my philosophy also. Troopers should be doing police work, law enforcement work. Sergeants should be supervising troopers. You know, there is some civilianization opportunities we could take advantage of that I’ve just seen in the first 3 weeks. You know the colonel has already moved some people from inside the facility to road duty. Although not popular, it is a fact of life these days that we need to get troopers out into the field, yes.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Right. Our most seasoned personnel in the most critical places that is for sure. Another area was the coordination with DMV on the highways and the weigh stations, and we, you know, have been working with that for a number of years, wondering if you had a chance to assess that, and do you think there is more opportunity there to -- to acquire more efficiencies?

JAMES ROVELLA: I have not had a chance to assess that yet. It hasn’t even came up on my radar yet, but I’m sure it will now.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Okay. So -- so that’s an area that I think is right for, you know, further efficiencies, and so -- and you’ll have a great opportunity to come before the Appropriations Committee. [Laughing].

JAMES ROVELLA: [Laughing].
SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): And, we can talk more about it then, so I'd be curious, you know, at that point what -- how -- your assessment is.

JAMES ROVELLA: Okay. All right.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): And, I thank you, and would like to offer my congratulations to you.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you very much.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator. My vice-chair, Representative Phipps, has the floor.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Congratulations, Commissioner.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you, sir.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I wanted to thank you for your service. I know the impact that it has both personally and also on your family. My brother is on the job in North Branford at the local office there, and so I -- I -- I understand the gravity.

JAMES ROVELLA: Right. Tell him to be safe.

[Crosstalk]

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And -- I’m sorry?

JAMES ROVELLA: Tell him to be safe.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Amen. Senator Witkos talked about community policing, and I really do think that’s the best way in order to keep our community the most safe. What role will the community and the general public play in your administration?

JAMES ROVELLA: [Laughing] Great question, and it’s one I’ve been contemplating for weeks now because I’m missing that connection from DESPP to the
community; whereas, in Hartford you know we walk out the door and we’re just in the community and we know everybody in the community, so it’s early yet, but I’m crafting kind of how I want DESPP to interact -- the entire agency to interact with the community, so you asked about community policing too, and -- and I refer to it as the secret in law enforcement. The secret is this. It’s not always police officers or troopers enforcing the law. It’s actually the community policing their own area and the way they do it, neighbors and neighborhoods, and how it just starts to rebound outside of that, so that is a secret that I want to build out there. I want to be imbedded in as many communities I can get around to. I want to build coalitions ‘cause those are important, not only just in the community but in different agencies around the state, but you know, with the NAACP, you know, in Hartford, Mr. Ansari from the NAACP is one of my best recruiters, and if he saw a foul, he’d call it on me, and we had a great relationship. So, I think I’m very open to talking with as many people as I can in the community and building that coalition on these relationships going forward.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And, since you brought up fouls, what role do you think the community should play in reviewing when things don’t go right?

JAMES ROVELLA: Ah, good question, again. So, we were brought up a little differently in Hartford. Some by consent agree, others by our choice, and when I say that, you know, we had citizens imbedded in our Firearms Review -- our shooting review board, so when I walk through that a little bit, there were citizens and there were officers, and within 5 days, they had to get a summary of what we knew to date. And, then there was a civilian review board of
different officer alleged misconduct, so that wasn’t run by the police chief. It was run out of city hall. We took it a step further. When we took it a step further, we have a Selections Board. We have what is called automatic disqualifiers from being a police officer and subjective ones. Subjective ones are pretty much we’re not gonna throw you out, but we need to have a panel discuss some of these subjective ones. We place civilians on that subjective board, and I have to tell you they were far tougher than the officers were because they were judging folks anonymously I don’t want them as police officers or I do want or they made a mistake, so we would bring the community in as much as we could. You know, we talked about round tables with folks and their impressions of what they thought we should be, right. We also had a little saying in Hartford that good news came out quickly, bad news came out quicker. You shouldn’t always have coffee with the chief when there’s bad news. You should just have coffee with the chief and just discuss what’s on your mind going forward, so I hope that bringing, you know, my presence outside a little more from the walls. I preach that with my faith base group. There’s a great group in Hartford that came outside the walls of the church and the synagogues and the different perishes and wanted to participate in making a difference, so I’m hoping to get outside a lot more and start some different things.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And, I would hope that you would continue being a strong advocate for that community relationship. I know in my own hometown we do not have a civilian review board, so would love to have you advocate for those sort of processes both in my hometown of Middletown but also
throughout the state. How will racial equity drive your administration in the work that you do?

JAMES ROVELLA: Well, you have an internal and you have an external component to that, right? The internal component is, you know, I’m driven by also the -- the six pillars from president Obama and some very smart people around the country that talk about equality within your organization. So, within means, how do we hire people? How do we promote people? How do we advertise opportunities to promote or to move in different areas? So, I’m a big proponent of that. Racial equity outside, you know, we -- we talked fair and impartial policing before anybody else did in the state. We actually brought trainers here to train the trainer, and I gave it away to other police departments to identify those biases that live in our minds and also those biases that live in your minds. You know, how do we recognize those, especially when we’re pulling over cars or dealing with our public? So, inside and out, we’ll have a -- we’ll have a good conversation.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that. That’s something that I care deeply about. If you need an advocate on our side to make sure that we are having our forces that are reflective of our community and thinking about our community from their own perspective, I will gladly help you champion that.

The last question is in regards to those officers and those that are serving that experience trauma while serving. What help and support do you think they should have and what are the best practices that we should be implementing around the state regarding trauma, and the reason I ask that question, not to get into the -- the gory details of it, but my brother -- that I had mentioned -- on his
third day of serving by himself saw an unspeakable horror that I wouldn’t wish on anyone, and was put back on the line with no debriefing, no counseling, no support, no therapy, no nothing literally the next day, and I think that’s -- not only do I think it’s immoral and wrong and it puts his life in jeopardy, but I also think it puts the community’s life in jeopardy, so I was wondering if you could speak to the trauma with that, kind of is the nature of the job, and what resources and support should be happening?

JAMES ROVELLA: So, you’re in the area of officer wellness, not only mentally, but physically, financially, and not only through their job but through their families, right? Because if you have a sound officer, everything else falls into place, so the incident you described to me -- so you have employee-assistance programs, right, and I saw your eyes. It’s like oh my God, no, we’re not going into an employee assistance, I’m going to have nothing to do with those folks, so a level before there is there’s -- there’s teams in different police departments, along with the state police, for debriefings after those critical incidents, right; sharing those thoughts. I’ve been there, and you know, going back 20 or 30 years, it wasn’t in the parking lot over a beer or at the bar. It’s much different now, right; so we try to debrief people on a much different level before it starts to become a bigger issue, and then those services for EDP are available, right? You may need a little more deeper services for -- discuss different events. We understand that, and the idea here is to address the problem before it gets big. You know as an administrator, I can’t say enough about your actual personnel. They’re the biggest investment the state
makes or the city makes is in their personnel. Two or three years on the job, they’re million-dollar investments. You want that million-dollar investment to be whole. You want them to be successful or heard, always successful, but be well, so it’s an area I’d love to get into. We -- we spent a lot of time in Hartford doing that. You’ll find out I pay for some Yoga classes, I pay for other events for folks, and we had dedicated personnel there that would address the stress management.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you.

JAMES ROVELLA: You’re welcome.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yes, Senator Hartley.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you much for a second time, and I apologize. Perhaps, this has already been discussed and if it has, then just let me know and I’ll catch up. But the issue of hiring is very important and one of the great frustrations that we have had over as long as period of time as I’ve worked with this agency is that -- so we offer a test, everyone goes in and takes the test, and then we have the eligibility list. We never get to the bottom of that eligibility list because it’s time for another test, which means people are rated by virtue of the test results -- whatever those numbers are -- and that does not give in your hiring -- at least in my opinion -- in your hiring experience the opportunity to fully consider everyone who has made the threshold and therefore, translate into a more representative class in terms of what we’re trying to achieve with the -- the state trooper force as a whole, and I’m just wondering -- I’ve been told -- and I’m not sure if I just kind of heard this as a
sidebar -- that no longer is it going to be required that you hire according -- once you meet that threshold, that you hire just by virtue of going down that list, that you have latitude to look at the whole pool who have made the threshold cut.

JAMES ROVELLA: So, it’s been discussed quite a bit here.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): I apologize.

JAMES ROVELLA: No, let me -- I’ll be brief and -- and kind of describe to ya there’s a whole component that has to go into recruitment, and I forgot to mention too that the TAP Two policy that folks found excluding them will be updated also. The testing procedure with DAS will change. No longer those big proctored exams, but to the end of your question, I hadn’t heard the last part about -- they’ve discussed banding with me, but they haven’t got as deep into it as you just described.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): So, that’s my understanding and yeah, I mean if you make -- the way I’m looking at it, if you make the threshold, you establish -- that establishes the competency level and therefore, as opposed to you know being required to you know go down that list item, you have the opportunity to look at the whole candidate pool, and then that obviously helps to meet the department goals I’m assuming.

JAMES ROVELLA: I’ll take a look at that.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you.

JAMES ROVELLA: And, ask DAS too as we go further down the road.
SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Oh, thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, I believe that concludes the questions. I’d just like -- like Representative Phipps said, you know, we had the whole issue of PTSD here, especially after the Newtown massacre, and anything you can do -- I mean there has to be a better solution than just removing the firearm from the officer suffering from PTSD. There has to be some -- some supports to help the individual. I’m hoping that -- that you will work on that, and I know you did a great job as Hartford chief and an excellent job, and I’m sure you’ll do an excellent job in your new role, and congratulations again --

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): For your appointment by Governor Lamont, and before I let you go, I have the final question I ask of all -- of all nominees. Is there anything in your background that you believe would prove embarrassing to this committee, to the governor, or to the state of Connecticut?

JAMES ROVELLA: No.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much, and congratulations again.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): And, we’ll take 5 for a stretch and be back with our final nominee.

As is customary, you’re given an opportunity to make your initial statement.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Okay. Thank you very much. So good afternoon Representative Vargas and
distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I’m Mirian Delphin-Rittmon, Commissioner of Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services or DMHAS. It is an honor for me to be nominated by Governor Lamont to continue to serve as commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, which is a healthcare agency that provides services throughout Connecticut to over 105,000 individuals with psychiatric and substance use conditions on an annual basis, and so I thank Governor Lamont for this nomination.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. You have my full testimony and my resume before you, and so in the interest of time, I’ll summarize some of the information that you have before you in terms of my background and some of my goals as commissioner.

So, I received my bachelor’s degree in social science from Hofstra University in 1989, my doctorate in clinical psychology from Purdue University in 2001, and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in clinical and community psychology at the Yale School of Medicine in 2002. I served as faculty member with Program for Recovery and Community Health or PRCH in the Yale School of Medicine, and also worked as a clinician at the Connecticut Mental Health Center. The DMHAS Local Mental Health Authority in New Haven. My responsibilities at CMHC included providing individual and group therapy to individuals with serious and persistent mental illness and addictions. I’ve held the position of the Director of Culture Competency and Health Disparities Research and Consultation with PRCH, consulting with state, national, and local organizations on system
design and service delivery strategies for promoting person-centered, culture-responsive, and recovery-oriented care. My work with DMHAS began in 2003 through the DMHAS Yale partnership where I was a policy consultant and worked on a range of initiatives including the DMHAS State Transformation Grant and the DMHAS Health Disparities Initiative, which I received national recognition from the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I’ve held various roles at DMHAS including the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Senior Policy Advisor, and Deputy Commissioner.

In 2014 -- May 2014 that is, I completed a 2-year White House appointment within the Obama administration working as a senior policy advisor to the administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. While at SAMHSA, I worked on a range of initiatives addressing behavioral health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform. I was appointed the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in April 2015. In all of my roles at DMHAS, and particular as commissioner, I’ve worked in partnership with individuals in recovery, their families, DMHAS staff, advocacy groups, my sister state agencies, and service providers to ensure that individuals have the resources they need to live meaningful full lives in the community. It has been my privilege to be part of the DMHAS successes over the past 16 years. The DMHAS Behavioral Health Home Initiative has improved the health of -- of -- has improved the health of participants yielding millions in cost savings, and last fiscal year, our forensic services diverted over 1400 individuals from jail and into the DMHAS service system. Seventy-five percent of the individuals in our early
psychosis program experience an improvement in symptoms, and I led the department as we addressed and continue to address the opioid crisis gripping our state, bringing in over $36-million-dollars in federal funds from prevention through treatment and recovery services and support.

One of my earliest initiatives was to deploy recovery coaches to emergency departments to engage individuals presenting with substance use into effective treatment. This initiative, which began as a pilot, is now -- it has been expanded to 11 hospital emergency departments across the state and has led to the creation of national legislation to replicate this initiative across the country. Last year, the department augmented stated resources by bringing in over $80-million-dollars in federal funds, and many of these grants were competitive grants. These are only a few of the examples of positive outcomes achieved by the department during times of fiscal constriction.

I have effectively managed the department through a number of challenges including creating two separate hospitals, Connecticut Valley Hospital and Whiting Forensic Hospital to address some of the specific needs of the forensic population. In the face of serious incidents of abuse, I have implemented policies and strategies to address this abhorrent behavior, and I’m confident that these improvements will result in better care for the people that we serve.

My goals as commissioner include continuing to address the heroin and opiate crisis that we’ve been challenged with and evolving Connecticut’s integrated behavioral health system by partnering with state agencies and individuals with lived
experience of behavior health conditions. Some of my additional priorities include moving the concept of citizenship within the behavior health disorders, then the behavioral health system forward, as well as building on the provision of recovery-oriented, whole-person care while addressing discrimination against those with behavioral health challenges. I am eager to continue working with 150 private not-for-profit agencies with which we contract for services. They are an integral part of our system and one -- an integral part of our healthcare system, and they consistently work side-by-side with us and ensuring that we provide services that are both evidenced-based and cost-effective.

Continuing to lead this unique and diverse agency will allow me to evolve the many pathways of recovery, citizenship, and care for the whole person. I respectfully ask for your confirmation of my appointment so that I can continue to build on the already exceptional work going on at the department. Thank you for the opportunity to be -- appear before you, and I’m happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, first of all, let me congratulate you on your reappointment. The fact that a new administration has reappointed you to the position of commissioner speaks for itself, so I want to ask you a couple of questions. There is actually three questions some of the constituents wanted me to ask three areas that they had a concern, and one had to do with the cameras and whether you believe that the cameras are helpful in substantiating instances of abuse and neglect? They also ask why they don’t have audio on it? It would be better if they had audio because they you would
have a clear record of -- of what occurred? Any ideas --

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Or thoughts on that?

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. You know, I do believe absolutely the cameras have been helpful. They have been helpful because it provides us additional information to be able to review in instances of -- of anything that might come up into potential allegations of abuse or you know any -- any other instance that may come up. It is additional footage that we have to be able to review. We had long discussions about whether to include audio in that, and some of the thinking was it for -- for some individuals that are there and had been there for decades and may be there for another decade. The cameras in and of themselves can be -- for some people -- feel intrusive because it is a hospital and it’s supposed to be a place of healing. It’s not a prison, and so some of the concern is that if we have audio then that is -- it’s another layer of intrusion and a lack of privacy for individuals, so we felt that a compromise would be certainly to at least, you know, start with cameras in terms of continuing to put cameras up around the campus. There is the option for audio, but the audio is not -- is not currently turned on.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Another area of concern was about the least restrictive environment whether -- I guess there was a patient at filed a class action suit against DMHAS. So, the question I guess is what is DMHAS doing to ensure the patients get their civil commitments in a timely manner -- reviewed in a timely manner, ensuring that there is adequate
capacity and that they’re discharged to the community in a timely manner if there’s no -- any need for care.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah, and so that’s something that we’re continually working at as well. Continually looking at individuals who there’s a term that it’s called discharge ready and looking to find placements in the community that would be an appropriate fit for the continued work and the continued evolution of their recovery, so we’re -- we’re continually working at that. There are sometimes challenges with finding places that are an appropriate fit, but again, it’s something that we’re -- that we’re working on in an ongoing basis to -- to find sites that are the right fit for individuals. Sometimes we -- we will often do case conferences with the full clinical team with family members, sometimes with community providers to explore just that issue. You know, what is going to be the good -- the best fit, and what the appropriate timing will be in terms of when a person is discharge ready versus not discharge ready, so it’s something that we are continually looking at as we review people’s treatment plans and their recovery process.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you. And the third and final question was in terms of preventing criminalization of mental health, what do you believe the department could do to help individuals, especially those of nonviolence status to -- you know, help them get into recovery-oriented treatments with supportive housing and benefits rather than into criminal institutions.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. So, we have a number of collaborations with the Department of Corrections
in fact. We do in-reach, so for individuals that are connected to Department of Corrections already. We do in-reach to try to connect them to services and some of the thinking is that for those individuals that may prevent their return to prison if they’re connected to appropriate services, if we help them with housing, if we help them with employment. Many of the social determinants of health. You know, we work to connect people to the services and supports that they need, so that’s once piece. I think another piece is you know we’ve been doing -- we have some community providers. We call them our RBAHOS, our Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations, and many of them do community conversations with community members about what’ working with services, what’s not working, recommendations they have in terms of how individual can better access services, and we look at that information, and so we’re continually evaluating our system and working to create additional entryways into system -- into the system and services for people. I often will do forums around the state, and I think that’s a good way to get information out about the services and supports that are available, not just for individuals that are struggling with opioids. Often the forums that I have been doing recently, probably the last probably 4 years or so, since I became commissioner, many communities have wanted to do opioid forums to increase people’s awareness of the services and support that are available. We’ve had discussions recently though of now expanding that and -- and doing forums related to mental health issues, and there are some community groups that have started to convene. Some of those are already addressing things like suicide, depression, and so we’re looking to increase those types of forums as well.
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you for those responses, and now, I’ll open it up for any other questions. Yes, our ranking member, Representative Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon. Just a few quick questions. We’ve talked many, many times over the years.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): We see it in a lot of other states, recovery centers for both alcoholism and drug addiction pop up. Florida comes to mind. A lot of these centers are predatory in nature. They -- they thrive by treating someone, getting their insurance, sending them home, and hoping that within the next month they come back because they’ve relapsed. Connecticut has become something of an environment where we’re ripe for those types of agent -- those types of companies. What is DMHAS’ role in ensuring that bad actors don’t start popping up in Connecticut?

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: So, in terms of other recovery centers that have come into the state? So, currently, we don’t have a specific role in that process.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): That’s why I ask.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yes. I know. Yeah. We don’t -- I mean there are centers that we don’t fund. Yeah, sometimes they are -- there are different types of centers that are popping up. In some instances, there are sober homes, and we’ve had discussions about those. I don’t know if you’re including those in -- when you say centers?
REP. PERILLO (113TH): All of the above.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: All of the above? Yeah. So, in terms of the sober homes, and this was a big discussion I know last session and I’ve been hearing that this will be some additional legislation coming forward this session. One thing is you know that we have in place is as an incentive for Silver Homes to become certified, and now, we do have certifying bodies in Connecticut, so as an incentive, I think, for certification, we will actually list the Silver Home on our website, so we have a real time bed availability website, which will let an individual know when beds are available real time, where they are in the state, and so now there’s an additional component to the website as a function of that legislation, and so thank you for your advocacy for that as well because I think people have been saying it will be helpful as more Silver Homes get certified and are put on the website, so that’s one place where we have had a specific role because we are helping to get information out about where some of these Silver Homes are that have gone through the extra steps to become certified.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. What though in terms of some of the larger recovery centers that don’t have great track records in other states, either the company themselves or the ownership? Often times, it’s the ownership. You know, Ventra Capital comes in, they bring in an administrator who has run other facilities, many of which have had multiple violations in other states. You know, I know, of course, they have to go through the certificate of need process. Does -- has DMHAS ever gotten involved in testifying during the CON process? Is there any plan to do that going forward?
MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: We haven’t in the past been involved in that process. At times, the sites that come up, they’re sites that work with individuals that have private insurance, so it’s a bit outside of our purview. Nevertheless, we do want services and supports in the state that are quality services and supports, but up to this point, we haven’t been involved in that process, in part because those centers are not part of our service system. As you know, DMHAS, we as a -- our legislative authority is with individuals who are uninsured or under insurance or on Medicaid, and so that is our population that we tend to work with and so perhaps there is a role for us there. I’m certainly open to discussions around what that could look like. I do think we bring a -- as a state authority on mental health and addiction services, we do have some expertise there, obviously [laughing], so certainly, open to discussions in terms of what our role could be, but we don’t currently have a role.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you for that. I appreciate it. Congratulations and best of luck.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Any further -- yes, Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here and willing to serve that is subject to this, so this is after so many people with mental health, drugs and alcohol addiction, many times -- I might go on a little, but you see a homeless person, and sometimes I sup with veterans or other shelters out of town, and they’d be on the street for years, and you ask them why, and it’s I can’t find housing. It started with they lost their job, and then they started drinking, and then drugs,
and it’s a spiral that just -- just it’s continuous, unfortunately, so I always -- we have CBH in Middletown as other areas, and I would hope someday we have some designated housing, not just for veterans but for homeless folks, but with also some sort of education component. Not -- just something vocational so they could be part of society again, and I think through the years we’ve cut back on so much, and I think we really there’s so much addiction right now, and not just heroin but alcohol and mental health, which leads to homelessness and leads to so many bad things to society, and we really need -- really, really need to work as a -- as a state in our communities to make things better. It’s sometimes it’s resting things that we let people out too quick. If they’re on state assistance, they can only stay a day or two or there’s not enough insurance to cover them, and then they’re back on the street in 3 or 4 days, or it’s against their will because they can’t speak to a parent because they’re already teen, but you know, there’s things prohibiting that, and I think we have to have that honest conversation that I don’t -- as well as we have good intent, I don’t think we’ve done enough, and I’m not -- believe me, I’m not blaming. I think we need to work a little harder together, so.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. And -- and we’re -- you know, housing is it’s a fundamental --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): It is.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Need that people have, and it does connect with so many other sort of life -- life circumstances, and so we’re absolutely -- absolutely interested in continuing those conversations, and we do have a robust supportive
housing program, and it does help to connect people to many of the services --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yeah.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: And supports that you talked about. You know, sometimes for people who have unstable housing, employment is a problem, and so we would help to offer employment services as well, and then connect people to mental health or addiction services --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: If they need those as well because that can help keep a person housed, so it’s not just getting housing, but it’s helping people to keep the housing that they get and then help them to get connected to employment that helps them feel like, you know, they have a valuable role. You know, I mentioned earlier that one of my goals moving forward is to continue the -- the -- to advance the concept of citizenship. Citizenship is not the traditional -- I mean that in not the traditional way we often hear it.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: But we often talk about the five Rs, so helping people to have valuable -- or connect them to valuable roles, rights, responsibilities, relationships, and resources, and so you know, employment is a big part of that as is housing and then connecting them to services and supports.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): It is, and -- but, when it comes to treatment, we -- I think we need to -- we have to have the resources, and there’s always a cost to everything, but there’s a greater cost, I
think, when you don’t do anything, and I’m just -- I’m just going to be here to advocate if I can help in any way, and I -- I feel passionately about this, and I’m sure everybody does the same way, but I think -- that’s all I have to say, but I wish you the best, and I think we could go -- we have some vacant property in the Middletown area and other parts of the state that we could maybe eventually put some transitional housing, so sort of volunteerism areas, something to work together as a community with Columbus House, Easterseals, Good Will, so many great organizations -- Big Brothers and Big Sisters and private and public partnerships. Thank you.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. Thank you. So, we should definitely meet then to talk about some of those ideas. As you know, we fund Columbus House. We do quite a bit of work with Easterseals and Marrakech, so --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yep.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: So, we can definitely talk some more about that.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I [Crosstalk].

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. That’s great.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): And he helped -- 4 or 5 in the morning a homeless veteran on the street that had nowhere to go, and now he’s at the Columbus House.


REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): The Chair recognizes Senator Witkos.
SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations doctor on your reconfirmation. You had mentioned in your opening remarks regarding your agencies work with the DOC, but I have a question. Do you have a program established or are you looking at one dealing with non-incarcerated individuals that are part of the judicial branch system, so they may have gone for an arraignment and case dismissed or continued and they’re back out on the streets; is there anything that your agency is doing with those folks as far as a formal program?

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: So, we have a number of different diversion programs, so -- so these are individuals -- are you saying individuals that aren’t in prison but that are connected with the courts or they’re beyond that process?

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): All right. So, the reason why I ask that question and pose that question to you is that the judicial branch, obviously, reaches out to legislators every year asking if we want to come out on a tour and everything, and so the Litchfield County delegation was invited to the Torrington Superior Court complex on Monday, and it was devastating and quite honestly shocking to hear that one judge shared with us that over a 5-year period he had to dismiss 70 cases because the defendant was dead basically from what he thought was a drug overdose, so not in custody of the state of Connecticut, but out doing whatever they’re doing, and to me, that sounded like a really high alarming number, so I didn’t know what formal programs do we have in the state that somebody can make themselves available to with your agency?

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. So, we have a number of programs with the Court Support Services Division
where individuals once they’re diverted from -- from prison or jail are then connected with our services and supports, and then in terms of our community services and supports, we have just a range of community services and supports where we have people that do outreach, so some of our outreach workers could potentially connect with and likely are in -- in some of our programs connecting with individuals maybe who have had previous justice involvement, so -- so certainly, I think that’s an area where we could do more, but we do have an area of collaborations both with CSSD and with DOC to -- to help connect people to services. I’ve had some -- some intersection with the justice system.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): And I think I want to throw out an offer to meet with you subsequent to today regarding some issues that I -- one of my priorities I wanted to work on this session. Both Representative Cook and myself have a bill that we jointly filed having to do with suicide, addiction, and depression, and you know, we worked on it for a couple of months with what we would consider experts out in the field from the insurance companies, to hospital association, to first responders, paramedics, the judicial branch, Mental Health Addiction Services, Prime Time House. It goes on and on and on -- the list. However, one of the topics that is contained within the bill, from what I’m told, is very controversial, and I’ve been told will never pass this building, but I kind of wanted to get your feeling of it and understanding of it briefly today, but then we can talk offline further was the nonconsensual admittance for an addiction.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. And, so I’ve been hearing that that is likely a legislation that’s gonna come forward and that -- and so, you know,
it’s a challenging thing, you know, and I get the arguments on both sides. I mean from family members what we’re hearing is the family members just want their loved ones safe. They want them safe, connected to treatment and services and supports, and is felt that if they’re mandated into treatment that, you know, that could help to start them on the recovery process. When we look at some of the data and literature, there’s not evidence there that that can help move someone in terms of promoting or helping them move into long-term recovery. In fact, some of the stages of changes literature and some of the other literature suggests that and the recovery literature suggested that in fact could be traumatic for somebody if they’re forced into treatment and they’re not ready in terms of their decision making or where they are in terms of stages of change. That that could potentially be traumatic and reduce the likelihood of their connecting with treatment down the line when they are ready because now they’ve had this traumatic experience, which closes the door for them, and again, everyone’s recovery journey is different, so I absolutely am interested in participating in those conversations in terms of what that -- you know, what that legislation and what that could look like. My interest would be, of course, reducing -- you know, we don’t want people traumatized by being forced into treatment when they’re not ready, and so I certainly would want to have more discussions about sort of just what the legislation looks like, and --

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Sure. I’d love to continue that discussion because at some point I agree it shouldn’t be your first time, but what is the trigger amount to say to somebody, well, you’ve overdosed 3 times, 5 times now. You’re unable to
make those decisions on your own. Your family -- next time, you may not be around, so all they want to do is try to get the person assistance, but we can talk offline --

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Well, I mean --

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): About that. One of the other things is a group had gone up to visit a stabilization center up in Newark County and there’s another one down in Texas, and it’s a treatment facility that really deals specifically with addiction and depression, and it’s the way I’ve seen it and heard -- and I’d like to see -- talk about mirroring that in Connecticut -- is if an emergency first responder goes to a scene, and this person is not medically traumatized. If they -- you know but has to go to a trauma hospital. Then they can go directly under the medical control to this facility, saving millions of dollars because you don’t have the overhead of -- of surgical unit, ER, ‘cause those really aren’t designed for that, but yet, you have the specialty folks in that profession here at this facility 24/7, attached with housing, however long you need it, maybe the 30, 60, 90 days, whatever. Have you heard about that and these types of centers in your -- from your colleagues around the country and how are they working?

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: I have heard about that. So, the -- I believe Rhode Island has them. They can be effective. They can be effective. It’s an alternative to emergency department, alternative to also in-patient -- a more formal in-patient setting. There are some that are run by people in recovery and community members. I think there are probably different consolations of what that type of center looks like, and so I’m certainly open to exploring
that as well. I mean some of the issue, of course, would be resources, how we would fund something like that, but there is benefit to having an additional place like that where individuals can go. I think the closest thing we have maybe is our respite centers are similar. It’s a place where a person can go. It’s not an in-patient setting, but it is a -- a place where if someone’s in crisis or having emergency they can go under our staff there who are with them and can make sure that they’re okay, and so our respite centers are probably the closest thing we have to -- to that type of site.

To your other -- to what we were talking about before, you know we do have recovery coaches working all over our system and state, and I think that that is -- it’s proven valuable in terms of helping to connect people to treatment and working with them in terms of stages of change. The recovery coaches will often follow up with people 2, 3, 4 times, and they share their own experiences of -- of recovery, and I think they give people hope, and they help people to see that you know recovery is possible. They also help people to not feel alone as they’re struggling, and so we’ve seen tremendous outcomes with our recovery coach initiative. Right now, they’re connected to 11 emergency departments around the state and they’ve connected over -- I think there are around like 1500 people to treatment so far, and prior to that program, what we were finding is that people would end up in the emergency department and sometimes not connect to services and supports afterwards, but now, the recovery coaches are following up and -- and connecting with the individuals and family members, and -- and getting people connected to treatment and other community
services and support in a way that doesn’t involve mandating them or forcing them into care.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Resources always is -- is a key whether it’s personnel or programs, but you know, it could also be detrimental, so I’m hoping that if your department gets a phone call from the Office of Fiscal Analysis that should cost out something that do considerations taken to the unknown parameter of the savings in the long-term because I’ll share one client of Prime Time House who shared with us that by his estimates the state’s already spent a million dollars on him, and if it wasn’t for the Prime Time House, which is -- I know you’re familiar with that -- that he hadn’t been in the hospital in 6 years. It would be a lot more than that if it wasn’t for this nonprofit agency in Torrington that he could go visit to help him with his treatment, so you know, the easiest way to kill something in this building is to put a huge price tag on it, and so I would hope when we’re investing in these agencies or these buildings to provide services to folks, that we look at the long-term effect that it could be cost savings by keeping them out of emergency rooms, etc. to kind of allow us to continue to have that debate. Thank you very much for your time. I’m going to take you up on my own offer to you about meeting to discuss the bill further.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah. Absolutely. I’d be happy to do that. Thank you.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we’ve had a long day, I just have one comment to make, and that is to thank you. You are graceful and wonderful and dedicated service to the department over 4 years, and I look forward to continuing that. Thank you.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Thank you very much. I look forward to working with you as well. Thanks.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Witkos. Representative Phipps, my vice chair.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Congratulations on your nomination. Typically, I would ask questions about equity and outreach, but we’ve been working fairly closely with one another for, I think, even before I was actually sworn in.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Yeah.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): So, I just want to just share a quick story for those in the audience and those watching at home when it comes to -- when we ask questions about equity and outreach and what does that mean, and there is some conflict going on in one of the agencies that you oversee, and in that room, to suggest that it was hostile -- I don’t wanna say -- hostile might be too strong of a word -- but some of the folks were hostile I will say. That’s probably a lot more accurate and the level of dignity and grace that you withheld, when to be frank many -- several, not many, but several were just disrespectful. It is something that I will never forget, and I have seen that sort of actions that would never be sent my way, but for those folks that have a different experience than mine, is all too common, and it reminded me distinctly of my executive director that faced a similar room just
like that, and I wanted to say I really appreciate your level of care and thoughtfulness in that issue, and the fact that you are just doing wonderful work. So, I will definitely be supporting you fully and look forward to continuing to work with you.

MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, and -- and if I can say? I mean I appreciate your -- your being there in some of those tough meetings because it -- it shows I think our staff that -- that you care, and that this is something we can work on together. I mean I said in that meeting and I believe in it. It takes a village. It takes all of us, and so they can reach out to -- and I encourage them to reach out to whoever they have to -- and then let’s stay at the table. Let’s stay at the table and get to a place where it feels comfortable because, ultimately, it’s about ensuring that our clients are receiving the best care that they actually can, and so a big part of that is having the staff and -- and our DMHAS community communicating and being on the same page around that critical vision as much as possible. So, thank you for your support, and I look forward to working with you as well.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well, as I said at the beginning of the -- of the hearing the fact that Governor Lamont has decided to hold you over from a previous administration shows that he has confidence in you, and by all accounts, you’ve been doing a great job, so we look forward to continue working with you, and once again, congratulations on your reappointment. And, before I let you go, we will ask you the final question; is -- Commissioner, is there anything in -- in your past that would prove embarrassing to this committee, to the governor, or to the state?
MIRIAN DELPHIN-RITTMON: No. I’m pretty boring. I don’t get out too much. [Laughter].

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Well -- well, that [laughter] -- that concludes the interview. Thank you for participating and sharing with us your views on the department and your role in the department. And, with that, we’ve come to the public section where we allow members of the public who want to speak regarding one or more of the nominees an opportunity to come forward. I know there’s at least one, so you can come forward, and state your name and what -- what commissionerhip you’re addressing and your concerns.

TOM MCCORMICK: My name is Tom McCormick, from West Hartford, and it involves Katie Dykes because I’ve already sent you an email that states ‘No On Katie Dykes’ as the heading, and I’ve also sent you quite a bit of information under the title of ‘Millstone Puts Connecticut at Risk’ involving Katie Dykes recent work at PURA to enter into a secret deal with Dominion Nuclear Connecticut to grant them, which I would assume is above-market rates, because Dominion would not be going there if it wasn’t to get above-market rates that they’re presently getting, and I request that you suspend any action on nominating Katie Dykes today, and table it until you have done a full audit of the Green Bank, and I’ll tell you why.

She’s obviously been a director of the Green Bank and deeply involved in it. The Green Bank has become a run-away agency that is no longer serving its original purpose. It has become self-dealing. It’s now up to over -- just shy of $100,000-dollars per year for salary is the average salary there now, but a particular concern is what they did setting up
a non-profit called the Inclusive Property Capital -- Inclusive Prosperity Capital. You guys know what that is? I didn’t. Well, it’s a nonprofit that the Green Bank funded with $6-million dollars of the ratepayer’s money. Guess where the new employees of the non-profit came from? From the Green Bank, so it’s self-dealing, and the Green Bank is even paying salaries of these people in this non-profit now, apparently for a couple of years. If that’s not self-dealing, I just don’t know what is, and they’re going around the country taking ratepayer money from Connecticut citizens and using it and leveraging deals across the country, not just dealing with Connecticut, but all across the country. They’re basically running around the country on Connecticut ratepayer’s money setting up these financial deals.

I can only say that you know what’s going to happen. These people are going to be suing out of these non-profits, and they’re going to be working for the financial institutions. You know it’s coming. Now, so I just ask you to suspend and wait and find out what’s going on with Katie Dykes and the Green Bank and Inclusive Prosperity Capital. No to Katie Dykes.

And, I sent you a lot of information already on this Millstone aspect. Katie Dykes I am told is personable, confident, experienced, capable, and fully, you know, capable of running the agency. That’s not the question. The question is her judgement, and what she has done when she’s been in position of authority to direct state energy policy. The first thing we’ll deal with is this ethics question. There’s two aspects. I feel badly for Ms. Soto because Katie is her boss, and therefore, she has to be concerned about what Ms. Dykes -- [Crosstalk].
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): The buzzer just rang, but if you could summarize --

TOM MCCORMICK: I will.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): I’ll give you a couple -- a few more seconds.

TOM MCCORMICK: There is a personal relationship between Dykes’ husband and Soto’s husband. They went to school together. They’re buddies. She’s in a very tough position to oppose Katie Dykes in any way or to have as a paper wall. It just doesn’t exist, and justice came up. Sometimes it’s what people don’t tell you is when the truth is hidden. Katie Dykes wanted low-income people to pay $300 dollars for their energy audits, but she was pushed back, and it got lowered to $175 dollars, but she gets before you and says, oh, I’m concerned about low-income people. The truth is there, and I just -- you know, I will write this up and I will send it to you, and I just ask that you don’t rush into this and you audit the Green Bank, and you find out what’s going on at Inclusive Prosperity Capital. Thank you.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Thank you. Any other member of the public that wishes to address the Executive Nominations Committee? If not, I will enter into the record the correspondence that -- that we received. There was, of course, the -- the letter that we received from -- from the ethics attorneys, basically, stating that there was nothing unethical on the part of the way that the commissioner had handled herself by recusing herself with issues that intersected with the -- with the bank. We had a couple of other correspondences that spoke to the -- in support of the nominee, and -- and we had one piece of correspondence that talked about the

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importance of putting more emphasis on the environmental functions of the agency over the energies in terms of the DEEP. Other than that, that was it in terms of correspondence, and I think all the members got a copy of the correspondence, so I won’t actually read it verbatim. Then, we heard from the gentleman who spoke, and if there is no one else that -- that has anything to say, I think that concludes the public hearing portion of our meeting. We will take a 2-minute break and reconvene for -- for action. Thank you.

All right. We’re reconvening for the purpose of taking action on the matters before us. I’d just like to announce that we will keep the votes open until 5:00 p.m. for those people who are in other meetings.

First item of business is the nomination of Melissa McCaw of Middletown to be Secretary of the Department of Office of Policy and Management. Is there a motion? All right. It’s been properly moved by everybody’s chair, seconded it. Will the Clerk please take the roll? This is a House vote.

CLERK: Vargas?
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yes.
CLERK: Phipps?
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Yes.
CLERK: Perillo? D’Agostino? Davis?
REP. DAVIS (57TH): Yes.
CLERK: DiMassa?
REP. DIMASSA (116TH): Yes.
CLERK: Godfrey?
REP. GODFREY (110TH): Yes.

CLERK: Verrengia? Yaccarino?

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yes.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Our second order of business is the appointment of Vannessa Dorantes of Bristol, Connecticut to be Commissioner of Department of Children and Families. I’ll ask -- since this is a House Resolution, I’ll ask the House members if there’s any variation from the previous vote. If everyone is still voting, the affirmative and let the record show that this vote will be identical to the previous vote since nobody’s left the room or come in, except for Representative DiMassa who came in just in time for the last vote. [Background discussion off mic]. Yes, we can and we have.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Have a roll call vote?

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yeah, we -- this is -- what we’re saying is the roll call is taken because nobody has changed their vote, so --

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I just didn’t want it to cause a complication for their nomination -- [Crosstalk].

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): No, it’s in the practice in the committee.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Okay. It is? Okay. [Background discussion off mic]. Thank you.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you for that question.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): But, thank you, yes. We wouldn’t want to trip anybody up. If there’s no change, then that -- the votes for Vannessa Dorantes will reflect the same votes as for Melissa McCaw, and our third nominee is Katherine Scharff-Dykes of
West Hartford, Connecticut to be Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Do we have a motion? It’s been properly moved and seconded it. Is there any variation from the previous two votes on this nominee? Well, we have — — we’re gonna have to do a roll call because we have a new member in the room. Could you please take the roll?

CLERK: Vargas?
REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Yes.

CLERK: Phipps?
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Yes.

CLERK: Perillo?
REP. PERILLO (113TH): Yes.

CLERK: D’Agostino? Davis?
REP. DAVIS (57TH): Yes.

CLERK: DiMassa?
REP. DIMASSA (116TH): Yes.

CLERK: Godfrey?
REP. GODFREY (110TH): Yes.

CLERK: Verrengia? Yaccarino?
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yes.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Okay. That concludes the House portion. The next two are Senate nominees, so we’re going to need a Senator to make the motion. The first item of business is Commissioner James Rovella of Old Saybrook, Connecticut to be Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. Is there a motion? Okay.
So, it’s been moved by Senator Hartley and seconded by Senator Formica.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Senator Moore moved it.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Oh, Senator Moore?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Yes.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Okay. Okay, so you thirded it. All right. [Laughter]. So, please take the roll of Senators.


SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Yes.

CLERK: Hartley?

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Yes.

CLERK: Kushner? Moore?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yes.

CLERK: Witkos?

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Yes.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): And, last but not least is the nomination of Mirian Delphin-Rittmon of Meriden, Connecticut to be Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: It’s been moved.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I’ll move.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Okay, so it’s been moved and seconded. Will the clerk please take the roll?

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Yes.

CLERK: Hartley?

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Yes.

CLERK: Kushner? Moore?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yes.

CLERK: Witkos?

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Yes.

REP. ED VARGAS (6TH): Now, the last order of business is there will be another meeting of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee that will be next Thursday, day after tomorrow. It will be at 11:00 a.m. in this room, and I’m sorry to say, but I think it will be another lengthy meeting. We have five more commissioners coming up, and the meeting after that, we have five more, and there may be more in the hopper. Is that Correct? All right, so who knows. We may have to add a sixth to the next meeting or the one after that because we’re facing a deadline for the -- for the committee to conclude its work. Any -- any further business before the committee? Any concerns? All right. If nothing else, then this meeting is recessed -- recessed until 5:00 p.m.