

Questions for the Children and Families Commissioner Nominee

By: Jessica Callahan, Associate Analyst
January 26, 2023 | 2023-R-0037

Commissioner of Children and Families (CGS §§ [17A-5](#) and [17A-6](#))

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

Summary

1. The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is tasked by law with evaluating DCF's service delivery to children. The Child Advocate is also the head of the Child Fatality Review Panel, which reviews the circumstances of the death of any child placed by DCF in out-of-home care ([CGS § 46a-13l](#)). In fulfilling these responsibilities, the office must report its findings to the legislature along with recommendations to address any issues identified in the report. From your experience at DCF, how would you characterize the agency's current relationship with OCA? In what ways, if any, would you wish to change that relationship?
2. What are your legislative priorities for the 2023 session?
3. As co-chair of the DCF Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup, you collaborated with staff, DCF partners, and families to discuss how racism and power impact agency practice. As the DCF commissioner, what steps will you take to address the disproportionately high number of minority children in the department's care?
4. How do you plan to build and foster trust between DCF, communities, and other public and private agencies?

5. Some critics of the department say it has gone too far in shifting the placement of children from group homes to relative and kinship care, doing so without adequate support for the family members or plans in place for the children. What is your response?
6. What do you see as DCF's strengths and weaknesses? What actions do you plan to take to maximize those strengths and reduce the weaknesses?
7. CT Insider recently [reported](#) on OCA's determination that DCF was deficient in its effort to protect an infant who died of fentanyl poisoning in February 2022, and as a result OCA is now investigating DCF's safety planning practices. DCF has since focused on training staff and improving protocols for working with parents with substance abuse issues. What will you do to continue to strengthen the agency's safety planning practices and ensure that caseworkers are equipped to handle families in high-risk situations, specifically those with substance abuse issues?
8. There is a high demand for children's mental health services, and often there are long waitlists for children to receive these services. In December 2022, CT Insider [reported](#) on the high demand for the Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services (IICAPS), and DCF's efforts in working with the Department of Social Services on increasing insurance reimbursements to provide greater access to this program. What else can DCF do to ensure that children are receiving the appropriate mental health services to fully address their needs?
9. A current lawsuit accuses the Village for Families and Children (the "Village"), a partner agency of DCF, of negligence resulting in the 2019 assault of an 11 year-old girl, "Sunshine", by a teenager at the Village's Short-Term Intensive Treatment program after DCF removed her from her adoptive family's home. Since this incident, this program was closed and a new model of treatment has been adopted by DCF. The CT Mirror [reports](#) that hundreds of DCF families receive outpatient care through the Village and that, as of late October 2022, four children were placed in the Village's Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility. How would you characterize the agency's current relationship with the Village? How does DCF work with the Village to ensure proper care and monitoring of the children in the department's custody?

JC:co