



Joette Katz
Commissioner

DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

For Immediate Release
February 9, 2012

Contact: Gary Kleeblatt
Office: 860-550-6305
Page: 860-260-0940

Family Participation Provides Foundation
For Next Phase Of DCF Transformation
Four In Ten Reports Will Be Diverted
From Investigation To An Assessment

HARTFORD -- The continued overhaul of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) during the second year of Commissioner Joette Katz's tenure will focus on improving participation by families in their own case plans and treatment.

One of the most fundamental changes will impact the way approximately 40 percent of reports to the Careline are handled. Instead of the traditionally-used, adversarial, forensic-style investigation, Department staff will engage families in an assessment that can lead to community services identified by the families themselves. This reform, known as the Differential Response System (DRS), will begin in early March. This occurs as DCF implements a new Strengthening Families Practice Model for all its work built around gaining family participation in social worker visits, safety, risk and family assessments, case planning and individualized services.

"Experience and research indicate that the quality of family participation is the single most important factor in the success of our work," Commissioner Katz said. "Differential Response and the Strengthening Families Practice Model promise to fundamentally improve how we engage families to take control of their own treatment and their own lives."

Appearing today at an informational hearing before members of the Human Services Committee and Select Committee on Children, Commissioner Katz briefed lawmakers on the major reform activities and several important trends that developed in the first year of the new administration. These trends, each of which corresponds to major directives from Commissioner Katz, include:

- The percentage of children placed with relatives when initially entering care in 2011 rose to 24 percent compared to 14 percent the year before. The percentage of children overall placed with relatives has risen to 19.1 percent in December 2011 compared to 15.3 percent in January 2011.
- The number of children in an out-of-state placement fell to 216 on January 1, 2012 compared to 364 a year earlier. That is a reduction of 40.6 percent.

- The use of congregate care for younger children has been significantly reduced. The number of children age six and under in congregate care settings fell by 74 percent from 38 in January 2011 to 10 in December 2011. The number of children ages 12 and under in congregate care has also decreased from 201 in January 2011 to 123 in December 2011 -- a reduction of 38.8 percent.

Commissioner Katz said that while these are important advances, much more remains to be done to improve the holistic well-being of children served by the Department. This second-phase of transformation, marked by Differential Response and the Strengthening Families Practice Model, will be vital catalysts to build upon and expand the trends set in the first year, she said.

Under Differential Response, reports to the DCF Careline (formerly known as the Hotline) will be handled in one of two ways. Reports of physical or sexual abuse will continue to receive a traditional forensic-style investigation. Investigations also will occur for reports involving potential criminal charges and for homes with two or more previous substantiated investigations, a previous Superior Court adjudication of abuse or neglect, or a previous assessment of high risk.

Low and moderate risk cases meeting all the criteria initially will be assigned to the alternate or "Family Assessment Response" track. However, if in the course of the assessment any child appears to be unsafe or if the risk level is determined to be high, the case will be switched to a traditional investigation. All cases will receive a safety and risk assessment.

Social workers assigned a Family Assessment Response case will conduct a face-to-face visit with the family and work with the family to identify its strengths and needs. Staff will seek the family's participation in an assessment designed to strengthen the capacity to raise its children. If the family wishes to participate, the worker and the family together will identify solutions, including access to responsive community-based services. Families whose cases are closed, as well as families whose cases remain open, will be able to access community services. To support the delivery of services, community partner agencies have been selected in all six DCF regions in Connecticut.

Approximately 30 jurisdictions have implemented Differential Response, and studies report better outcomes for children, including higher family satisfaction, lower repeat maltreatment and fewer child removals. For example, a Minnesota study indicates families are more cooperative and successful because they actively participate in identifying solutions to their challenges. In addition, the studies indicate that child safety is not compromised.

Simultaneously, the Department is rolling out the Strengthening Families Practice Model, which will guide all its work, including responses to abuse and neglect reports, behavioral health services, juvenile services, foster care, in-home services and work at DCF-run facilities. Gaining family participation is the foundation underlying the model, including family-centered assessments, purposeful visitation, effective case planning, initial and ongoing safety and risk assessments, and individualized services. Training for all staff in the Strengthening Families Practice Model is expected to be completed by mid-year and its implementation will be Department-wide at that time.

-- end --