

Professional Biography



Michael P. Starkowski

Commissioner

Connecticut Department of Social Services

Governor M. Jodi Rell administered the oath of office to Michael P. Starkowski as Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Social Services on March 27, 2007, following General Assembly's confirmation of the longtime public servant to administer the 2,100-staff, \$4.5 billion health and human service agency.

Commissioner Starkowski, who rose through the ranks over a three-decade public service career, is a leading authority on public financing of health care for children, elders and people with disabilities. He is currently assisting Governor Rell in plans for the new Charter Oak Health Plan to bring affordable coverage to uninsured adults in Connecticut, beginning in July 2008, along with additional public health initiatives approved by the legislature during the 2007 session.

The Department of Social Services delivers a wide variety of services to children, families, adults, people with disabilities and the elderly, including health care, child care, child support enforcement, rehabilitation and independent living services, energy assistance, food stamps and program grants. As a 32-year state employee, Commissioner Starkowski has wide experience in human service program administration and systems development.

From 1993 to his nomination as Commissioner, he served as Deputy Commissioner for Administration at DSS. In this position, he managed state government's largest agency budget and had direct responsibility for such critical areas as public health care financing and contracting with hundreds of non-profit and for-profit human service organizations.

As a hands-on manager, the Commissioner has been instrumental in developing such varied initiatives as Medicaid managed care, digital imaging for identification of clients, electronic benefits transfer, and an automated eligibility verification system. During his time as Deputy Commissioner, he was also active in major state negotiations such as the *CHA vs. O'Neill* settlement regarding hospital rates, Federally-Qualified Health Center reimbursement issues, the Medicaid managed care contracts, the managed care

enrollment broker contract, the non-emergency transportation contracts, the child care administration contract, and resolution of nursing home financing and operational issues over the years.

Commissioner Starkowski also managed the development of pharmaceutical cost-containment initiatives such as prior authorization, generic substitution and a preferred drug list, while developing service initiatives to expand the ConnPACE program that provides access to, and substantial payment for, pharmaceuticals for the elderly and people with disabilities. In 2005, Governor Rell assigned him responsibility to coordinate the design, integration and implementation of benefits provided by state pharmaceutical programs, in conjunction with the new Medicare Part D drug benefit.

As a policy-maker, Commissioner Starkowski was a leader in the creation and 1998 implementation of Connecticut's Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth (HUSKY) Plan, which continues to be an exemplary health coverage program, serving over 315,000 Connecticut residents. Designed to bring health insurance to all of Connecticut's children up to age 19 at either no cost or low cost to parents/guardians, the HUSKY Plan was cited by the Children's Defense Fund as one of the top three children's health programs in the nation. For his work in this area, Mr. Starkowski received the Excellence in Children's Policymaking Award from the Connecticut Children's Medical Center and the Mohegan Tribal Nation in March 1998.

In September 2006, he received an award presented by the Connecticut Association of Optometrists for outstanding leadership in ensuring that low-income citizens of Connecticut receive quality eye care and vision services. Also in September 2006, he received the Connecticut Pharmacists Association Special Recognition Award for his outstanding commitment to the profession of pharmacy. The first non-pharmacist to receive the award, Mr. Starkowski was recognized for his efforts in developing creative solutions and engaging advocates, pharmacists, health care providers and the University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy in a partnership to successfully implement Medicare Part D for the seniors in this state.

Commissioner Starkowski began his career in the original Department of Social Services, which he joined upon graduation from Central Connecticut State University with a bachelor's degree in accounting in 1974. When the agency split into the Departments of Income Maintenance and Human Resources (DHR) in 1980, he was selected to be the new Director of Administration at DHR. He was responsible for fiscal management of federal and state resources that funded programs operated primarily by non-profit and municipal human service organizations.

A key manager in implementing the merger of the Departments of Human Resources, Income Maintenance and Aging in 1993, Mr. Starkowski was appointed Acting Deputy Commissioner of Administration in the new Department of Social Services, overseeing a consolidated budget of over \$3 billion at the time. He was later appointed to full Deputy Commissioner of Administration, overseeing medical care administration, management

information systems, quality assurance, human resources, contracts administration, and budget and fiscal analysis.

Throughout his career, the Commissioner has worked to ensure careful management of public dollars while maximizing effective and creative delivery of human services throughout Connecticut. A lifelong Hartford-area resident, he resides in Rocky Hill with his wife, Karen. The couple raised two daughters and have a grandson and two granddaughters. The Commissioner is an avid UConn basketball fan and memorabilia collector, as anyone who has visited his Hartford office can attest.

[updated September 2007

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