

Implementation Sub-Committee of the Task Force on Federal Legislation of the Children's Cabinet

MEETING MINUTES

July 8, 2005

Linda Katz called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM. Introductions were made.

1. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The June 24, 2005 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved as written, with one exception. On page 1, Item 2, TEEN PARENTS, paragraph 2, minutes are amended to read "federal law requires" that students under 16 not enter GED programs until the student turns 16.

2. UPDATE ON LEGISLATION

A lengthy discussion took place regarding bills which were introduced during this recent legislative session, in particular those proposed by One-R.I. A brief discussion took place around the fact that the Task Force was very concerned that the bill to impose full family sanction after only 18 months of non-compliance did pass, and they were very disappointed that more of the positive proposals failed to pass. Regarding the bill to expand the education and training provisions in FIA, there was particular disappointment and several

members of the Task Force voiced their major disappointment on the failure of passage on that bill specifically.

Linda Katz then advised the group about the change for family home day care providers requiring adults with children to access Rite Care (RC) by applying for RC federal first and then applying for the state program. Regarding the change where the income threshold went up from \$1,800 to \$7,800, Donalda mentioned that this can be achieved if provider cares for 2 preschoolers inside of 6 months. Another change requires those up to 350% of the federal poverty level to participate in cost sharing as all other participating Rhode Island families do.

Linda brought up the many RC cases that close when cost sharing is not paid and there is a 4 month penalty. Linda said they are considering that those cases can come back on when they pay what they owe.

Ed Sneesby stated that the policy is being prepared for health care implementation for child care providers in October. The group is working on transition of 400 families who participate. This will end when the other begins. There is a need to keep health plans informed of their eligibility.

There will also be a public hearing examining elimination of the former sanction policy. We want to do this at the same time.

Tentatively, effective October 1, 2005, we want to get the pregnant women out of the cost sharing program.

Ed reassured the group that we will reach out to child care providers to try to get as many eligible on the program as possible and that Donalda will keep them updated on these issues. It was also added that it is good that when a person applies, and the system determines eligibility, it is not necessary for the person to say whether they are a provider or not. They will still be considered for the RC coverage.

3. 18-MONTH FULL FAMILY SANCTION

General Discussion – Implementation Plans

It was stated that we will try to notify this Task Force of any policy changes, so it is important for everyone attending to sign in and provide email addresses. We will also share all FIP and Child Care Program notices. Donalda encouraged the group to attend the public hearing that week to testify on the Full Family Sanction policy change. This policy closes the entire family to cash for noncompliance after 18 months if they fail to comply with a plan or fail to file a plan. According to the policy, they can reapply if they agree to comply.

The July Quarterly Report includes details regarding their sanction and asking them to call. Information regarding the time limit includes a tracking sheet of which months will count. The report also includes information to call if utilities are shut off. A statement regarding the clothing allowance will also be included with the notice.

Heidi said that there is too much information on this Quarterly Report.

She noted that 49% of the caseload has less than a 12th grade education and that this much information is overwhelming. Ed Sneesby said that the telephone number of the local Community Action Agency is on the notice to assist people. He assured the group that we try to keep language as simple as possible on the notices and that we use other methods of communication with clients, as well. Linda Katz suggested that the group can look at notice language again. Ed offered that we can put fewer things in the notices and that we are willing to change language, which could be done by the January notice.

Ed added that Henry Shelton of the Wiley Center has asked that a telephone number be added to the notices to help with shut off problems year round. Ed stated that the local office phone number is on the notices.

In discussion of difficulties of clients being connected by telephone

to the appropriate worker, Ed asked Tom Dalton to relay a message to Tina Janik to remind offices that the switchboard is to refer to the coverage worker if the client's worker is not in. Linda suggested that an additional message is needed to tell people to "dial zero" or to "ask for the coverage worker".

Jeannette Cabral informed the group that CCRI has been TABE testing applicants since last September. They have tested about 1600 people. This will help us to have more information about "where people are at" when they come in. Denise said Project Reach will be examining this data further and comparing it to the 433 tested in the year before.

R.I. Legal Services raised a concern about a situation where a three-person family trying to cure a sanction is treated like a two person family and is over income when they come back in to apply. In the discussion that ensued, Ed mentioned that there can be a problem of two policies clashing if it is a situation where the 60 months have been used up. Ed arranged for Legal Services to speak with Providence Regional Manager, Deb Messier, to correct the two cases in question. Linda suggested the need to clarify the regulation. Ed said that in our notices we are trying to fix that up.

Ed said that, effective September 1, 2005, 120 families are at risk for closure due to full family sanction. He said we will do the same as we did before for the 24 month sanction, sending notices, calling and

writing letters to everyone to be affected.

Heidi from Parents for Progress and Julie from the Wiley Center will get out into the community to encourage people to reengage with their social worker at DHS. Ed said we are not interested in sanctioning people. We are interested in getting employment plans completed. Linda suggested possibly setting up something with DCYF social workers and letting the network of other social service agencies know.

A handout was furnished to everyone at the meeting of:

- 1. The General Notice to the whole caseload of the change to the FIP policy.**
- 2. A Warning Letter to the caseload who are under a penalty phase because they are out of compliance and are in danger of losing their entire check.**

Ed said a ten day notice will also be sent. Linda asked if notices could be sent earlier. Ed said he would check on this Northrup Grumman, and perhaps they could be sent by hand. Parents for Progress and Wiley Center offered to help with this.

Family Violence Option (FVO) Advocate, Edna Mojica, asked about the effect of these policy changes on the undocumented alien. Ed explained that the undocumented parent is not affected because these are Child Only cases and the children in Child Only cases stay

on. FVOAP Advocate, Valerie Hobbs, said she had a domestic violence (DV) situation she had a concern about. Ed Sneesby suggested she talk to DHS DV Coordinator, Jeanne Hunter, for assistance. Jeanne, who manages the contract with the DV Advocates, offered to assist with this situation and to help at any time. Jeanne also reminded Valerie and the others that there is a process by which a case conference with the field staff and supervisory staff can be requested whenever a dv situation requires further discussion and review. Linda noted that the Family Violence Option Program was a “sea change” on how workers view dv. Linda said that we can tweak the policy if ever necessary.

Linda mentioned that there are always ways to improve services, that there is a need to link social services and eligibility to change the culture for the staff and clients. As ETs do every six months, social workers should also meet with their clients. Donalda offered that June Allen, Chief of the Rite Works Program is available to clients trying to cure their sanction. Social Workers can send clients to Rite Works, as well as to the Rapid Job Entry Program, for immediate referral. June assured the group that these cases are given immediate priority.

Linda advised that a client should request a hearing within 10 days of getting a notice and they will not lose benefits. They should then come in and cure the sanction.

4. OTHER ISSUES

Linda advised the group that TANF got extended again until September 30th. Screening/Assessment/Employment Plan and follow up on data requests and changes will be discussed at the next meeting.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting is scheduled for 9 AM on September 16, 2005.