

The Children's Cabinet
Tuesday July 21, 2015
DOA Conference Room A
1:00pm – 2:30pm
Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Governor Raimondo; Michael DiBiase; Regina Costa; Jamia McDonald; David Abbott for Ken Wagner; Secretary Roberts; Nicole Alexander-Scott; Jim Purcell; Melba Depena, Scott Jensen, Rebecca Boss for Maria Montanaro.

- ❖ Call to Order: Governor Raimondo calls the meeting to order, welcomes members and audience for attending.

Governor Raimondo: As many of you know today we are convening the children's cabinet for the first time since 2007. The cabinet was created by statute in 2001 but hasn't met since 2007 and it is time to change that as kids deserve it. The work that you do is often with the most vulnerable kids and it is key to coordinate with folks around this table to help that population. Let's commit together to say this is important, kids matter, families matter, let's make RI one of the best places for kids and families. We have work to do as a recent national ranking suggests. We have to make sure we improve the situation for children in areas of education, wellbeing, access to health care, and deliverable services out of DCYF amongst other things. None of this will be easy, I know that. Our economy is still one of the weakest in the country particularly certain industries; a lean economy compounds issues we already have. Despite all that we have to meet the challenges, but I am committed and I believe you all are as well to make RI a place for everyone. Inauguration slogan was make it in RI and that is what we need to commit ourselves to.

Today, let's focus on three goals:

- To improve the health, education and well-being of children and families in Rhode Island
- To increase the efficiency and coordination of services
- To improve data-driven and evidence-based decision making.

- ❖ **Governor Raimondo:** We know that data sharing is something that has to be better coordinated, better aligned, and more available to have better outcomes. The work that you are going to do will be supported by the principles and guidelines above and I task you under Secretary Roberts to make a five year action plan to improve outcomes among families and children with concrete measurables. Second, establish clear policy goals, performance measures for each agency, specifically how is your work going to impact children and families. Third, how do we get the best outcome out of the resources we have. I designate Secretary Roberts as the chair of this Cabinet and I am very confident in her abilities. At the end of the day, at the end of all this, a kid deserves a chance and may not get it unless we come together and do our job right. I convened this

because it matters to me and I know it matters to all you; I know this is very challenging work, and I know it is even more challenging than it has been. Mental illness is more prevalent, poverty is around us, public schools have a big role to play. I understand the challenge, but let's help each other, energize each other, make a plan and take action.

➤ **Introductions & Charge of Cabinet:**

Secretary Roberts: I am honored, but also agree that this is a moment that is overdue. I am really looking forward to this new team. I think it is important that we go around and introduce many of our members, since often we don't have this team all together. We have two directors who were unable to attend today, one out of state, one not officially in their role. Those here today are: Regina Costa, Child Advocate; Melba Depena, Director Department of Human Services; Scott Jensen, Director Department of Labor and Training; Jamia McDonald Chief Strategy officer DCYF, Michael DiBiase, Director Department of Administration, Dr. Nicole Alexander Scott, Director Department of Health; David Abbott sitting in for Ken Wagner awaiting to be confirmed as the new Commissioner of Education. Jim Purcell, Higher Education; Rebecca Boss sitting in for Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals Director Maria Montanaro who is out of state.

Secretary Roberts: Thank you, all. It was troubling to read this morning that we have dropped in our rankings nationally in the overall care of our children in our state. I think about how important it is that we have this economy moving, good jobs that support families. I do want to recognize there are some areas we do well in, health being one of those areas, and we want to be sure we maintain the quality we have reached there and continue to improve even in areas where we are doing well. Need to coordinate what we do more effectively, move beyond issues to do what is best to be effective and efficient for strong, positive overall outcomes. Director DiBiase mentioned that he used to come back in the old days, I was here as an audience member years ago. This tended to be a group that would get work done and not overstep on formality, and I would like to keep that tone going during this convening. Let's get work done, hear from the public, hear from each other and be successful.

Along with the three goals Governor Raimondo mentioned, we also have several guiding principles.

Leadership from the top—the Governor and her Cabinet directors—will ensure success of the overall strategic and action plan.

- Adequate cross-agency communications and coordination on matters relating to children is key to eliminating the fragmentation of services due to the programmatic responsibilities of agencies.
- The State has a responsibility to provide adequate services and supports to children, including but not limited to: health and mental

health services; foster care; medical insurance; quality education; safe schools, communities, and environments; and opportunities to engage civically and socially.

- Improved data collection and sustained data sharing will help the State identify services needed, any gaps in services, and ultimately ensure children and families have access to the services they need to live a safe and healthy life.
- Strong partnerships across agencies and with providers will help us to best support our children and youth and achieve our vision—collectively, positively impacting our families.
- Public education campaigns will help raise awareness of the issues facing Rhode Island’s youth and children

We have specific challenges, five year action plan is a tight timeline. We need to have clear policy goals and metrics, and the budget. The budget can be a challenging document to look at programmatically, and I would hope that we can do more of that. We also want to recognize we are not the only entity, need to look at the legislature, parts of their role that they are working on in these areas as well, bring perspective and work.

- ❖ **Jamia McDonald:** In the interest of rolling up sleeves, what we wanted to start with was an orientation to what the vision is for this group. Statute on the books, made sure it is up to date. As mentioned, there is a five year plan requirement, part of the discussion today is what that looks like, what we want that to be? The statute clearly articulates that as a deliverable. Comprehensive plan due by Dec 1, part of what we want to avoid is just a budget doc, but keep a programmatic theme to that which touches programs for children. Legislative requirement; strengthen the language around data sharing. The statute enhanced that language.

Secretary Roberts: We will have a public comment period at the end, just to keep order and efficiency.

- ❖ **Goals & Principles:** Let’s speak about these now and then discuss amongst members: improving health education well-being of children and families; increase coordination and efforts of; data sharing and equally protecting the privacy rights of children. With principle two we should be responsible to attach metrics; I know that was a characteristic of this cabinet in the past and I believe we should return to in order to have measurable progress.

- **Director Depena:** Child care is critical. DHS is looking at support for families for quality child care for low income families; reduce wait time for families applying for child care, taking that seriously in terms of measuring that;

making progress but would like to add on that.

- **Rebecca Boss:** Would like to focus on transition age, as transitioning youth are very vulnerable. The age can be anywhere from 12, to 14, to 18, depending on developmental skills. Grateful this cabinet was resurrected, and the need to develop subcommittees that are focused on finance and on treatment plans may come forward.
- **Secretary Roberts:** Good points also make me realize that we need to think about children of all ages, but often I think adolescents are overlooked.
- **Commissioner Purcell:** Would like to reiterate the idea of transition plans. Service delivery, really underscore it is not a modular system, but rather it is a hodge-podge. We are not the service deliverer in education, there is a real mix of having the service delivered in an agency and having oversight in another agency. I think if you start with a good view of the system, then look at the data, you are not starting with the data. We should be focused on the key decision points that impact a very complex system.
- **Director Jensen:** Best way to help a child is to work with a lot of folks around the table to better coordinate services. Often we hear people just don't work together well. Even coming out of some of our higher education institutions.
- **Director Alexander-Scott:** Echo what was mentioned on data sharing, tie that to our strategic plan outcomes so that we are specific in how we use that to drive specific plan goals. Want to all connect towards implementation.
- **Jamia McDonald:** I have been thinking of transition points at BHDDH, seems like key decision points are subheadings under each goal. When a foster child moves four times, they could move schools four times – refine themes within the principles.
- **Regina Costa:** Transition points are huge even as a plan from one department from another; also key working on going through different departments. Helpful to have all the agencies here, as often it could be an education issue holding up a DCYF kid, who cannot be placed in a BHDDH system. With the right data, with the right transition points we can do better planning.
- **Secretary Roberts:** Unique opportunity in this group is the people who define programs sit here. There are also transitions that are not run by government programs so we should keep those in mind as well.

Guiding principles:

Secretary Roberts: Through a National Governors Association technical assistance

grant, agency reps have already begun to focus on developing a strategic plan for early education pre-k through age 8, particularly for vulnerable populations. This coordination among agencies includes the Governor's Office, RI KIDS COUNT, RIDE, DHS, DCYF, DOH, and the RI Early Learning Council. This Children's Cabinet will help set the vision for this strategic planning effort for the future.

Areas to really think about: Race to the Top, Significant Medicaid changes in this year's budget, and we have some that impact kids specifically. Child welfare, particular items at DCYF.

Jamia McDonald: large policy issues and tactical get it done. From child welfare perspective, if we do child welfare right in this state we can get them home quickly. Make sure provider community is supported in doing that work. How many agencies our providers serve on any given day. How do we coordinate our buying of services so that they can get the good outcomes they need? Also, right now we have removed double the national average of children in RI than nationally. The last thing we want to do is separate a family, so ensure our laws make sense, and are all in the best interest. Also thinking about the issues, nationally, of sex trafficking, and think about jurisdiction – going beyond DCYF to education realm etc.

Director Alexander-Scott: From a DOH perspective a lot of energy and work has gone into our toxic environment and stress study. How to address what is going on around the child, particularly early on when neuro-development is just getting started, something that can impact life changes in the long run (education, jobs etc.). Crucial component to incorporate into our discussions here. Also, as mentioned, continuing to maintain and improve on further some of the points where we are successful; we are the state that does the best job immunizing children 6mos-35mos throughout the country. We want to keep moving forward on that – for example with HPV, message that it's to prevent cancer, not a vaccine to promote sexual experiences.

Rebecca Boss: Prevalence of substance abuse amongst the youth. Strengthen prevention efforts. Identify and prevent mental illness and substance abuse.

Regina Costa: In this state need to increase our foster care and adoption cycles as well. Provide strong community supports.

Director Depena: Wish to note how critical it is for departments to coordinate and how much of an impact children's cabinets have made in other states. I think we have unique opportunity to succeed. Data sharing really is key, and breaking down barriers on this.

Director DiBiase: Need to face that our investments and outcomes and child welfare, healthcare, and other union services, need to get to measurements, strategic choices to make them more effective, or streamline to see what programs make sense.

Secretary Roberts: Performance management work done in the budget is a great opportunity to look at that on the program side and inside government as well.

David Abbott: coordination at the policy level – point of contact is also important. Could be well coordinated, but doesn't necessarily mean that the quality of care at the student, child level is going up. For every conversation I have in my field about social learning, I have 10 about politics who feel we are having the wrong conversation about education in our state. Hope we see this as an opportunity of outreach, galvanize people to demand more.

Jamia McDonald: Rethinking the age of the child; juvenile justice division. Our population in DCYF is mostly under five and then 14+. Those leaving the training school or juvenile justice we need to be sure we don't lose them, need to think about that full age range.

Secretary Roberts: We will be meeting on a monthly basis, and I think running on a few tracks. One around issues which are urgent or have been dormant needing work done – to work together to get those cleared. Second to really get perspectives on things we need to focus on, adjust, and apply to the charge before us.

❖ Public Comment

Ben Lessing, CEO Community Care Alliance in Woonsocket: A couple points I would ask the council to think about: First historically in RI we have operated in silos; I would ask you all to consider communities, and populations. Understand what is occurring on the ground level. Child welfare, housing all matter to children, and while we have operated in separate buckets in the past and I think that's where the gaps have been: communities and services need to be customized. What is happening in Woonsocket is not the same as what happens in South County. I would invite you to Woonsocket, happy to host to have a conversation about what is going on there. Second, I would ask you to recall the LGBT population, put more emphasis in terms of addressing the needs of this population. We see many kids in the LGBT populations who are suffering: nowhere to go, lacking institutions that understand them. Third, and final point, while I hear discussion about collaboration and coordination, historically for providers this conversation between providers and the state has been a one way conversation. We have a whole group of providers in the field who understand what works and what doesn't; who understand the nuances and whether or not there are evidence based programs that work and I would encourage you to use us. We want to be your partners and make this work.

Joanne with Comprehensive Community Action: We operate from the perspective that poverty is the disease and everything else is result of that. We did a great job with food, not such a great job with housing. We are seeing now the transient nature of families who are threatened with eviction.

Bill Little: I work with an agency that provides services to DCYF in RI, and also

in MA. Providers also are disjointed, lack of coordination, so we have formed a RI coalition for Children and Families. All providers come together, not just DCYF providers, who will work together on common issues across all of us, across all of you. We hope to work in cooperation with you all; Jamia has been great.

Darlene Allen, Adoption RI: Transition age kids, certainly a lot of issues and concerns in that area, lots who want to help there so an opportunity for partnerships. Second, the work DOH is doing on toxic stress, and other programs we see that and want to build on those. Third, as said around homes for children, beyond that, making sure all of our children live in safe homes, helping those who are homeless, and integrating services. Thank you and I look forward to partnering with you all.

Andrew Gramerson, Providence Plan: home for RI data hub, partnerships with all of you around the table. For those of us who were here last time for children's cabinet. Want to reiterate the idea of toxic stress as important; restorative justice; chronic absenteeism; food security; persistence in higher education; these are key words we want to be sure are a part of the conversation. 0-5, adolescents, but also the 6-13 range: this is the data sweet spot and the answers to a lot of questions can be answered in that range. Many laws in the books are not being enforced, time to look at those laws as well, see how they are working, not just new laws but handle those already written.

Mike Schmidt, TIDES Family Services: Grateful reconvened this cabinet. Really important to understand the families and cultures you are working with in order to get good services and good outcomes. Mr. DiBiase I appreciate your comment about outcomes as program related, but warn that data needs to be good data. Good data can only happen when we know who we are working with; the mental health status of the people we are working with may not be there, need to do background to be on the same page and be fair. I think that is important, and getting good at that is how we make changes happen. We are ranked 32nd in the nation, but I would like to compare apples to apples with other countries, not just getting data to notch down, but really be good at issues that are driving issues critical to our environment.

Caesar Perez: Appreciate this we work with a lot of transition kids, recently on my end I am seeing a lot of this in newspapers, many issues within chronic living environments. When violence does happen what we do as a community to stem the tide of what children have witnessed.

Lia Stolsachs, Legal Services: I would like to dovetail on remarks made by Director Depena, the day care and child care issues. Many parents with children in care have trouble finding quality care that matches timing needed during different work jobs, then these parents who lose their child see that a foster parent receives the care needed. I think that if it can be provided for the foster

parent it seems respectful to provide it to the parent of the child to walk back from the issues that initially made the child removed from the home.

Jamia McDonald: There was a meeting a few weeks ago to really see that DCYF is truly transparent in what is available, Race to the Top is one of the agenda items we want to talk about.

Jill Beckwith, RI KIDS COUNT: Want to pledge support with data and policy. Hearing these issues, we say yes. All of them. If we can make concrete steps on many of these issues we will be making good progress.

Secretary Roberts: The other issue that has brought to mind listening to all of you, is program and other housing, education where we see significantly different impacts based on racial, ethical or cultural backgrounds

Director Alexander-Scott: Appreciate the mention of housing, and would like to consider including Barbara Fields in our discussions going forward.

- ❖ **Adjourn: Secretary Roberts:** Important to coordinate with the permanent leg commission on child care, also recognize the senate DCYF task force. Must work with the legislature; valuable approaches that we can look back to and forward with. This is a priority for the Governor. We will need not only for you to come and listen, but also engage with us. Thank you for participating today. Do not yet have our schedule prepared, but my goal will be to publish the remainder of the year's dates soon. Thank you for coming.