

**Children’s Cabinet Meeting**

**Unapproved Minutes**

**October 27, 2021**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Member Name: Attendees**

Secretary Marketa Garner-Walters

Commissioner Jay Dardenne, represented by Marsha Shuler

Deputy Secretary William “Bill” Sommers

Belinda Davis

Susan East-Nelson

Dr. Cade Brumley represented by Joni Smith

Judge Desiree Cook-Calvin

Secretary Ava Dejoie Cates represented by Tavares Walker

Secretary Courtney Phillips

Susan Schowen

**Special Guests**

Governor John Bel Edwards

First Lady Donna Edwards

Dr. Melanie Washington

Dr. Adren Wilson

Torrance Thomas

Thurman Thomas

Jane Herwehe

Jia Benno

**Staff:**

Dr. Dana Hunter, Children’s Cabinet Executive Director

Michele Rabalais, LCTF/CC Exec. Assistant

**Call to Order**:

Dr. Dana Hunter, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

**Roll Call:**

Michele M. Rabalais, Executive Assistant, called roll.

**Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

First Lady Donna Edwards welcomed Board Members and guests to the October 27, 2021 meeting. First Lady Edwards thanked Dr. Hunter for her leadership on the Children’s Cabinet and wished her the best of luck as she transitions to the Office of Human Trafficking Prevention.

First Lady Edwards reported that as of October, 2021 Louisiana has lost more than 14,000 citizens to Covid 19.

The First Lady also thanked the Cabinet and the Advisory Board for their work.

First Lady Edwards remains very active in the fight against Human Trafficking. She held her fourth Anti-Human Trafficking Global Summit. More than 600 people registered. People from 30 states, Guam, Australia and the Vatican participated. In addition, the First Lady joined national and international leaders in the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences at the Vatican to discuss the issues of poverty, foster children, as well as human labor and sex trafficking.

First Lady Edwards remains involved in the Louisiana First Foundation. The Annual Foster Summit will be held virtually on October 28, 2021.

Governor John Bel Edwards thanked Dr. Hunter as well as Cabinet Members and Advisory Board Members.

Governor Edwards informed the Cabinet Members that Dr. Hunter will be transitioning into a new role as the first Executive Director of the newly formed Office of Human Trafficking Prevention.

The Governor informed the Cabinet that Dr. Melanie Washington, a lifelong advocate for vulnerable children, has been appointed as the new Children’s Cabinet Executive Director.

Governor Edwards gave the following progress report:

1. The mask mandate has been lifted.
2. Baseline numbers have improved post Delta numbers. Deaths have remained high but the number of positive cases has improved.
3. School districts can opt out of the mask mandate as long as CDC recommendations are being followed. A number of districts will continue with the mask mandate. The Governor also stated that there is a possibility of another mask mandate.
4. People need to be vaccinated to reduce the numbers and minimize transmission.
5. In the next week to ten days a vaccine should be available for children ages 5-11.
6. A booster shot should be received six months after the second dose.
7. Louisiana faces a long road to recovery after hurricanes and COVID.
8. Relative to the 2020 storms, Congress recently appropriated $596 million. The Governor will keep working to receive more funding.
9. Lack of in-person schooling has resulted in fewer cases of potential child abuse being reported by teachers who are mandatory reports. In addition, children are facing more trauma and not getting the access to meals they would normally get through schools.
10. Child poverty was reduced by 40% due to the child tax credits. It is unknown if this funding will be available long term.

**Approval of Minutes**:

Belinda Davis made a motion to approve the April 6, 2021 minutes. Susan East-Nelson seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.

**Brief Presentation:**

Torrence and Thurman Thomas presented information regarding their non-profit organization, Tankproof. Tankproof serves youth in under-served communities with swimming lessons, food security, education, and life skills training. It provides quality swim instruction as well as feeds hundreds on its neighborhood food routes. The goal of Tankproof is to provide access, equity, and opportunity through swimming lessons to make communities safer and even save lives.

In 2021, Tankproof served over 2,350 individuals nation-wide with multiple sites in Louisiana, as well as Austin, Texas, and San Francisco, California and will be expanding to five more cities across the country. Discussion followed.

For more information on Tankproof you can visit the Tankproof website at: tankproof.org or by emailing hello@tankproof.org.

**Children’s Priorities**:

Susan East-Nelson presented the Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board’s priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. Ms. Nelson stated that there is a mental health crisis amongst children.

Recommendations include the following:

1. Comprehensive statewide infrastructure for Peri-natal, infant, and early childhood mental health consultation.
2. Comprehensive system for K-12 mental health.
3. Financial Assistance to Grandparents/Kinship Caregivers equal to what foster parents receive regardless of income.

No cost administrative recommendations include the following:

1. Addressing systems and processes related to the administration of public benefits.
2. Provide increased structure and support for the Child and Youth Planning Boards.

**Child Death Review Campaign:**

Jane Herwehe and Jia Benno presented on behalf of the Child Death Review panel.

Ms. Herwehe and Ms. Benno stated that there has been a rise in deaths of children under the age of fifteen who died due to access to firearms.

Due to this, the Child Death Review panel thought it would be helpful to create a campaign focused on getting families to securely store their firearms. This is not a gun control program but rather information for families about how to safely store firearms, out of their children’s reach.

The program has been tailored for Louisiana Families. The Louisiana Child Death Review Panel along with the Louisiana Chapter of the American Association of Pediatrics requested and received funding from the Louisiana Children’s Trust Fund to print campaign materials.

Printed materials should be available in early 2022. For more information or to request materials, please contact Jane Herwehe or Jia Benno. Discussion followed.

**Brief Remarks**:

Dr. Melanie Washington thanked Dr. Hunter, Governor Edwards and First Lady Edwards for their warm welcome. Dr. Washington stated that she is excited to serve and looks forward to working with Children’s Cabinet Members as well as Advisory Board Members.

**Other Business**

The Foster Care Summit will be held virtually on October 28, 2021.

**Public Comments**

Secretary Marketa Garner-Walters thanked Dr. Hunter for her leadership of the Children’s Cabinet and Advisory Board.

**Adjournment**

Susan East-Nelson made a motion to adjourn. Susan Schowen seconded the motion. All approved. Meeting adjourned.