

**Children’s Cabinet Meeting**

**Unapproved Minutes**

**April 18, 2023**

**Members Present**

Reshonn Saul, Chair of Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board

Curtis Nelson, Office of Juvenile Justice

Commissioner Jay Dardenne, Commissioner of Administration

Judge Desiree Cook-Calvin, representing Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Senator Regina Barrow

Secretary Stephen Russo, representing Louisiana Department of Health

Secretary Terri Porche-Ricks, DCFS

**Representatives Present (Not included in Quorum)**

Sonja Williams, representing Secretary Ava Cates

Joni Landry, representing Superintendent of Education, Dr. Cade Brumley

**Special Guests**

Governor John Bel Edwards

Dr. Chaunda Mitchell

Katina Semien-Smothers

Jolan Jolivette

Tamara Jones

Mattilyn Karst

**Staff:**

Dr. Melanie Washington, Children’s Cabinet Executive Director

Michele Rabalais, LCTF/CC Exec. Assistant

**Call to Order**:

Dr. Melanie Washington, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. and introductions were made.

**Roll Call:**

Michele M. Rabalais, Executive Assistant, called roll.

**Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

First Lady Donna Edwards provided the opening remarks. The First Lady remarked that it has been a privilege to serve in the capacity of First Lady for the past seven years and in a position to serve with the Louisiana First Foundation (LFF). LFF promotes music/art in schools, works with foster children and their families, human trafficking etc. The First Lady remarked that nationwide 60% of foster children have been involved in some type of human sex trafficking. The First Lady stated that even after leaving office she will continue to work with LFF.

First Lady Donna Edwards stated that she had the opportunity to speak with members of the Louisiana Video Gaming Association in ways that they can be a part of the solution to eradicate Human Trafficking.

In February the Louisiana Office of Human Trafficking Prevention hosted a free seminar with a focus on Culturally Responsible Approaches to engaging survivors of which the First Lady was proud to be a guest speaker.

Earlier this month the First Lady helped to celebrate the opening of the Eden Emergency Center. A one of a kind center in New Orleans. The new emergency center is available for adult survivors of labor trafficking, sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

In addition the First Lady had a chance to meet with Emergency Room nurses from across the state to discuss Human Trafficking. Discussion followed.

Governor John BelEdwards welcomed Cabinet Members and provided the opening remarks. Governor Edwards stated that the upcoming Legislative Session will be the final session of his term as Governor. Governor Edwards stated that the upcoming session is a fiscal session and he will continue to work to sustain the gains that have been made while he has been in office. The Governor stated that he has a focus on investing in critical priorities. He is requesting a raise in pay for teachers to keep teachers in Louisiana. Support personnel would also receive an increase in pay.

In addition Governor Edwards stating that he is asking for an increase in early childhood education. He is asking for the largest investment in the state’s history to go towards early childhood education.

Governor Edwards informed the Board that the Revenue Estimating Conference will meet in May and he is hopeful that funds will have additional revenue that can be incorporated into the budget.

Governor Edwards informed Children’s Cabinet Members that there has been a significant increase in the number of children coming into foster care and that the number of foster parents has been dwindling.

The Governor also showed support for the following:

1. Increase in minimum wage
2. Paid Family Medical Leave Act
3. Increase in wages for women
4. End to death penalty
5. Dolly Parton Imagination Library that would allow every child in Louisiana aged 0-5 would get a free book monthly. Discussion followed.

**Approval of Minutes**: Commissioner Jay Dardenne, Commissioner of Administration, made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2023 meeting. Curtis Nelson seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.

**LCTF Grant Awards Review:** Tamara R. Jones, Louisiana Children’s Trust Fund (LCTF) Executive Director, presented the LCTF Grant Review report and recommendations for funding. A copy of the funding recommendations report was distributed to Children’s Cabinet Members. Discussion followed.

**LCTF Grant Awards Approval:** Secretary Terri Ricks made a motion to accept the recommendations as presented. Judge Desiree Cook Calvin seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.

**Dolly Parton Imagination Library:** Jolan Jolivette and Mattilyn Karst presented information regarding the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Initiative.

In 1995, Dolly Parton launched an exciting new effort, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, to benefit the children of her home county in East Tennessee, USA. Dolly’s vision was to foster a love of reading among her county’s preschool children and their families. The new program gave each child a specially selected book each month. By mailing high quality, age appropriate books directly to their homes, Dolly wanted children to be excited about books and to feel the magic that books can create. Moreover, she could ensure that every child would have books, regardless of their family’s income.

Each month, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library mails a high quality, age appropriate book to all registered children, addressed to them, at no cost to the child’s family. Countless parents have shared how excited their child is when their new book arrives each month. Many groups and individuals work hard behind the scenes to make that special moment possible for each child.

HB 412 would allow funds to be used to allow the Imagination Library to expand statewide. LPB will partner with the state to expand reach to families across Louisiana.

Studies show that reading to a child increases their readiness for kindergarten and helps children to bond with their parent(s).

**Department/Agency Legislative Priorities:**

**Department of Education**: Joni Landry presented the legislative priorities for the Department of Education. Those priorities are as follows:

1. Comfort boxes received from the LA Children’s Trust Fund were distributed to students before testing.
2. BESE Board Meeting being held 04/18/23
3. Main bills DOE is following include the following:
   1. SCR 2
   2. SB 81
   3. HB 191
   4. HB 326
   5. SB 163
4. $21.5 million needed to support systems with operational costs to help off-set the price of health insurance and retirement
5. Teacher shortage is a real concern and the children should be the highest priority. There is a bill being submitted whereas a teacher can teach with an associate’s degree. These teachers would receive 75% of the salary of a certified teacher and would be assigned a mentor teacher.
6. Streamline the certification process
7. Focus on literacy
8. Increase in early childhood funding
9. Teach children financial literacy
10. Have 15 minute recess statewide to allow children to have a break. Discussion followed.

**Louisiana Department of Hospitals (LDH)**: Bethany Blackson presented the legislative priorities for the Department of Hospitals. LDH is following the two bills listed below:

1. HB 512
2. HB 493

**Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ)**: Curtis Nelson presented the legislative priorities for OJJ. Mr. Nelson reported that OJJ has no sponsored bills this session but OJJ is monitoring the bills listed below:

1. HB 65
2. HB 84
3. HB 208
4. HB 523
5. HB 416

**Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)**: Terri Ricks presented the legislative priorities for DCFS. Ms. Ricks informed the Cabinet that DCFS has one bill filed at this time. HB 337 which would eliminate the minimum child support award in the child support guidelines.

In addition Ms. Ricks reported that DCFS staff is monitoring 10,000 bills dealing with children and families. Also Ms. Ricks stated that DCFS continues to work on the No Wrong Door approach using available data to see what is working. Discussion followed.

**LA. Workforce Commission (LWC)**: Sonya Williams and Shana Veade presented the legislative priorities for LWC. LWC is monitoring the following bills:

1. SB 93
2. HB 596
3. SB 149
4. HB 374
5. HB 340

Discussion followed.

**Other Business:** DCFS Secretary Terri Porche-Ricks reported on the placement crisis for children in foster care. Secretary Ricks reported that DCFS is down by approximately 7,000 foster parents since 2020 and approximately 1,700 since last year. The lack of foster parents is causing a crisis as more children are coming into care and fewer homes are available. Ms. Ricks also stated that there is a lack of homes available for children coming out of psychiatric care. Ms. Ricks stated that kin needs to step up and take care of children instead of putting the children into care. Kinship care information is available through 2-1-1. Discussion followed.

**Public Comments:** None

Meeting adjourned.