

**Children’s Cabinet Meeting**

**Unapproved Minutes**

**February 2, 2022**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Member/Representative Name: Attendees**

Department of Children and Family Services - Secretary Marketa Garner Walters

Marsha Shuler, representing Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne

Office of Juvenile Justice Deputy Secretary William “Bill” Sommers

Department of Economic Development - Susana Schowen

Susan East-Nelson, chair of Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board

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

Kaffia Arvie, representing Louisiana Workforce Commission Secretary Ava Cates

Orleans Juvenile Court Judge Desiree Cook Calvin

Mark Thomas, representing Department of Health Secretary Dr. Courtney Phillips

**Special Guests**

Governor John Bel Edwards

First Lady Donna Edwards

**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 10:30 a.m. and introductions were made. Dr. Washington expressed her thanks to Governor and First Lady Edwards for the amazing work that they are doing. In addition, Dr. Washington thanked Children’s Cabinet Board Members for meeting with her as she begins to serve as the Children’s Cabinet Executive Director.

**Roll Call:**

Michele M. Rabalais, Executive Assistant, called roll.

**Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

First Lady Donna Edwards welcomed Board Members to the February 2, 2022 meeting. First Lady Edwards also welcomed Dr. Washington as the new Executive Director of the Children’s Cabinet.

First Lady Edwards reported that she continues to address the issue of Human Trafficking in Louisiana through her work with her Louisiana First Foundation. First Lady Edwards stated that Governor Edwards signed a proclamation declaring January as Human Trafficking Prevention month in the State of Louisiana.

In January, the First Lady hosted key state leaders and Human Trafficking survivors at a Human Trafficking Awareness Event at the Governor’s Mansion. The event included the nationally known speaker and author, Cyntoia Brown-Long.

The First Lady continues to hold Global Summits to raise awareness regarding the issue of Human Trafficking. Mrs. Edwards also stated that she recently established a National Coalition for the Prevention of Human Sex Trafficking. Several First Spouses across the United States have joined the First Lady and are committed to using their platforms to educate the public about Human Sex Trafficking.

In addition, Mrs. Edwards informed the Board about the Coalition’s upcoming event which will be a Anti-Human Trafficking Prevention Summit to be held in New Orleans on April 3, 2022. For more information, please reach out to Delery Rice or Dr. Dana Hunter.

Governor John Bel Edwards welcomed and thanked Cabinet Members and the First Lady for their work. Governor Edwards welcomed Dr. Washington as the new Children’s Cabinet Director and thanked her for her work.

Governor Edwards stated that 2022 is going to be a very busy year. Louisiana is still dealing with COVID challenges. It has been reported that 50% of cases are asymptomatic are mildly-symptomatic and not testing. The Governor reported that one of his top priorities is getting people vaccinated and boosted. Governor Edwards asked for help from Cabinet Members in spreading the word about COVID vaccinations.

The redistricting special session has begun and will last approximately two weeks. Redistricting is very important so that voting districts will more accurately depict the diversity of our state. The regular session will begin March 14 and end June 6, 2022.

The Commissioner of Administration, Jay Dardenne, has submitted the state budget to the legislature. One time funds for infrastructure and paying debt are included in the budget. Recurring funding will focus on health care and education. The budget includes pay raises for teachers and support staff. Pay raises for higher education professionals are also included in the budget. Monies have been set aside for higher education infrastructure as well. In addition, $43.4 million has been proposed for early childhood education.

The Governor also informed the Cabinet that he has heard the recommendations of the Cabinet and he is doing his best to incorporate these recommendations into the work of the Governor’s Office.

**Approval Minutes**:

Secretary Marketa Garner-Walters made a motion to accept the October 27, 2021 meeting minutes as presented. Susan East-Nelson seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.

**Presentation of Department Priorities and Proposed Legislation for 2022-23:**

**Department of Education**: Joni Landry presented on behalf of the Department of Education. Ms. Landry reported that the Department is currently worked with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education members to identify legislation that is needed. There are three policy topics that are currently being explored:

1. Teacher retention and recruitment
2. College career readiness and opportunities
3. Opportunities to improve teacher certification

Louisiana Department of Education has set up six goals and educational priorities. These are as follows:

1. Students enter kindergarten ready
2. Mastery on 3rd grade assessments and enter 4th grade prepared for grade level content
3. Mastery on 8th grade assessments and enter 9th grade prepared for grade level content
4. Students graduate on time
5. Students will graduate with college/career credential. Students will have the chance to earn an associate degrees while still in high school.
6. Students will graduate eligible for a TOPS Award.

Priorities include the following:

1. Ensuring every student is on track for college, professional career or service
2. Work on improving ACT scores, apply opportunities for an associate degree, additional credentials, dual enrollment, and improve IGP (Individual Graduation Plan) etc.
3. Remove barriers and provide equitable and inclusive learning experiences for all children
4. Professional development for teachers
5. Provide the highest quality teaching and learning environment
6. Meeting all academic standards making sure alignment can exist and helping teachers reach this goal
7. Provide more opportunities for arts, humanities, STEM and literacy
8. Develop and retain a highly diverse educator workforce
9. Improve educator compensation
10. Activate high impact partnerships
11. Highlight best practices

**Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS):** Secretary Marketa Garner-Walters presented priorities and proposed legislation for DCFS.

Secretary Walters thanked the Governor and First Lady for all the work that they have done and continue to do for the children and families in the State of Louisiana.

DCFS priorities are as follows:

1. Focus on workforce both for staff and clients. The two main priorities concerning the workforce are:
   1. Diversity, equity and inclusion. Treat everyone with dignity and respect DCFS has created a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion unit. A director has been hired and staff will be hired. This unit will help to assure that the work of DCFS honors diversity and inclusion.
2. Understanding poverty and how it effects the diversity and inclusion that we have in the State of Louisiana. All staff will be required to attend a poverty training curriculum.

Proposed Legislation:

1. Child Welfare – Allow for video recording of children at Child Advocacy Centers throughout the state to be admissible during the administrative appeals process.
2. Work Force – Help clients on FITAP get to meaningful and sustainable work that will allow them to get on a career path that will move them out of poverty and off public assistance. Proposed legislation would increase the 24-month limit on FITAP benefits imposed by the state.
3. 25 positions will be added to Child Welfare to address the critical staff shortage. The positions will be in Human Trafficking and the extended foster care program.

**Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ):** Deputy Secretary William “Bill” Sommers reported on behalf of OJJ. Priorities are as follows:

1. Move OJJ out of the work of just secure care and probation and parole into the front end of the system using diversion programs to keep youth out of the system.
2. Provide more education, mental health treatment and evidence based programming into the OJJ sites.
3. Make a switch in long term practices to be able to get out of the back end into the front end of the system. OJJ was recently awarded a $1 million grant to be used for system reform. This would provide for an entire system review including administration, probation, facilities, programming etc. In addition, the review will look at policies, data capacity, assess streams, case management capabilities and the current information flow.
4. OJJ also received a gender specific grant geared towards females that will be offered at the intensive residential treatment facility in Natchitoches. It will bring in evidence based programming such as correctional yoga, anger management and body projects for girls.
5. Two pilot programs for community assessment centers. These will be modeled after a successful program in Calcasieu Parish called the MARC (Multi Agency Resource Center). The purpose of the Multi-Agency Resource Center is for area agencies and organizations to provide services, and referral to these services, currently available to area juveniles in the community, all under one roof.  Parents will be able to bring their children in before they are brought into court system.
6. The new secure facility in Monroe is coming along and being built with programming in mind. Construction should be completed by early 2023.
7. OJJ is in the process of bringing a Human Trafficking Coordinator on and plans are to have a designated person in each of the eleven district offices to work with community partners, law enforcement and survivors. OJJ is now part of the Southwest Louisiana Human Trafficking task force.

**LA Workforce Commission (LWC):** Kaffia Arvie presented the Workforce Commission report.

The agency’s priorities are as follows:

1) Drive Your Future: 90 day apprenticeship for truck drivers.  The LWC hopes to

ease the truck driver shortage across the state by offering free truck driver training to qualified applicants.

2) LWC is working with the Motor Coach Association to try and have insurance rates lowered for young adults ages 18-21.

3) Provide a credentialing program through JAG (Jobs for America's Graduates) program. LWC is working with CDL and Health Care.

**LA Department of Health:** Deputy Secretary Mark Thomas presented the agency’s priorities.

The priorities are:

* Continue work on LDH Business Plan called “Together Building a Stronger LDH and Healthier Louisiana”. This is the first business plan LDH has had in the last decade. The document aims at assessing where the department is headed and to align goals with those of the Governor.

The business plan consists of the following initiatives:

* Improve health and well-being with an emphasis on prevention. The agency will work on improving health outcomes from pre-natal through childhood. LDH has set a goal that by December 2022 it will complete 4 statewide initiatives to address the leading clinical contributors to preventable maternal death.

1) Provide technical assistance and data support to birthing facilities.

2) Complete a comprehensive review of all 2018 deaths among individuals who were pregnant at the time of death or within the year proceeding death.

3) Launch the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Initiative to create sustainable change that would lead to the reduction of the number of low-risk first time Caesarean-section births from 33% to 28% through the first year.

4) Enact substantive policy changes to strengthen the state’s maternal systems of care.

* Promote breastfeeding and improve outcomes.
* Increase WIC breastfeeding peer counselor participation and strengthen provisions of lactation supplies.
* Strengthen Louisiana’s early and periodic diagnostic and testing system by increasing the provision of necessary but under-utilized prevention services.
* Increase and strengthen delivery of services to the vulnerable population.
* Reshape LDH team culture to advance equity, diversity and inclusion.
* Enhance customer service and community relations.
* Promote transparency, accountability and compliance.

Non-business plan initiatives include the following:

1) The Bureau of Nutrition Services will expand access to nutritious foods with an increase of $15 to purchase fruit and vegetables for those clients receiving SNAP benefits.

2) Implement ACT 421 Children’s Medicaid Option (TEFRA) which would allow certain children with disabilities receive Medicaid coverage regardless of parent’s income.

3) Continuation of post public health changes and waiver flexibilities for the children’s choice waiver to allow better access to services.

4) LDH is working to improve EarlySteps referral rates for positions implementing developmental screening due to a decrease in referral rates following the pandemic and hurricanes.

Legislation: ACT 210 was passed in the last legislative session creating the Office of Women’s Health under LDH. LDH will be working closely with the Governor to implement this new office in LDH.

Discussion followed.

**Other Business:** No other business.

**Public Comments:** Hilda Wiltz, SMILE CAA, offered thanks to the members of the Children’s Cabinet and offered her services to the Children’s Cabinet members.

**Adjournment:** Judge Desiree Cook-Calvin made a motion to adjourn. Susan East-Nelson seconded the motion. All approved. Meeting adjourned.