1. **Welcome, Introductions and Call to Order**

The Empowering Families to Live Well Council, ACT 581 of the 2018 legislative session, was called to order in the Governor’s Press Room at the Louisiana State Capitol on the 4th floor Friday, January 25, 2019 at 10:10 AM.

Senator Regina Barrow and Secretary Marketa Garner Walters called the meeting to order and welcomed members of the Council to the meeting. Senator Barrow introduced our Guest, Governor John Bel Edwards. Governor Edwards welcomed members of the Council and stressed his appreciation for their commitment to address poverty in Louisiana. Governor Edwards expressed the importance of ensuring every family is afforded the opportunity to get out of poverty. The Governor went on to highlight the efforts under his administration that support reducing poverty:

* The Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council
* The Council on the Success of Black Men and Boys
* Medicaid Expansion
* First Lady Donna Edwards’ No Kids Hungry Campaign
* Increased the Earned Income Tax Credit to 5% in the 2018 Legislative Session
* Need-based aid for Higher Education students
* Criminal Justice Reform
* Sub-Cabinet on Workforce and Educational Attainment

 In addition, the Governor outlined his priorities for the 2019 Legislative Session:

* Increase the state’s minimum wage
* Equal Pay for Equal work
* Teacher pay raises

Lastly, Governor Edwards announced that as a result of the Federal Government Shutdown, his administration will make Unemployment Insurance available for Federal Workers in Louisiana.

1. **Attendance**

*Members in attendance included: Senator Regina Barrow, Secretary Marketa Garner Walters, Representative Royce Duplessis, Veronica Freeman, Sarah Berthelot, Pamela Saulsberry, Lisa Brochard, Cashauna Hill, Keith Cunningham, Deborah Paul, Alexander Billioux, Robert Roux, Jan Moller, Kimberly Robinson, Sherry Guarisco, Susan Nelson*

*Guests in attendance included: Terri Ricks, Adren Wilson, Makesha Judson, Alfreda Tillman Bester, Janel Young, Emily Destifano, Ricky Masaracchia, Nick Albares, Velecial Rodman, Chip Coulter, Eric Horent*

1. **Statement of Purpose**

Senator Barrow provided an overview of how ACT 581, the Empowering Families to Live Well Council legislation came about during the 2018 Legislative Session. She communicated her purpose in creating this council and her goal of addressing poverty in Louisiana. “Strong Families are the key to strong communities, Strong communities are the key to a strong state,” said Senator Barrow. The purpose of the Empowering Families to Live Well Louisiana Council is to create a state strategic plan that will be well-managed and coordinated amongst state agencies and community partners dedicated to benefit and empower families out of poverty.

1. **The State of Poverty in Louisiana**

Jan Moller, President and CEO of the Louisiana Budget Project and member of the Empowering Families to Live Well Council, provided the committee with a broad view of poverty in Louisiana and what opportunities exist to address poverty in Louisiana. Some of the facts highlighted in Mr. Moller’s presentation included Louisiana has had the 2nd highest poverty rate for two consecutive years and the 1st highest Child Poverty rate in the nation. The median household income for a family living in poverty reflects a family of 3 with an annual income of $24,000. Louisiana’s poverty rates by race reflect deep racial disparities. For example, 48.9% of African American children in Louisiana are living below the federal poverty level, compared to 14.9% of Caucasian children.

Reflecting on the impact of families as a result of the Federal Government Shutdown, Mr. Moller explained that the government shutdown displayed that services of government are necessary to stabilize families. Mr. Moller also mentioned other resources, such as the ALICE Report by the Louisiana Association of United Ways, that reflect the state of families in Louisiana. The power-point presentation will be included with the meeting minutes.

1. **Pathways to Solutions Discussion**

DCFS Secretary and Council Co-Chair, Marketa Garner Walters led the council in an open discussion of identifying pathways and solutions to address poverty in Louisiana. She mentioned the Solutions to Poverty work accomplished during the Blanco Administration and asked Dr. Adren Wilson to share his reflections of leading that work. Dr. Wilson shared some of the achievements from Solutions to Poverty, such as: Introducing and successfully passing legislation for a federal Earned Income Tax Credit in Louisiana, developing a program to assist low income families prepare their tax returns and take advantage of eligible tax credits, creating a program for low-income families and individuals to open an Individual Development Account and offered Micro-Enterprise Grants to support Small businesses, and partnered with the state’s housing corporation to financially assist first-time homebuyers. Wilson explained that many of the projects under the Solutions to Poverty Initiative were funded through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars. Under the current state budget, TANF dollars are heavily funding LA-4 and Child Welfare. It was also mentioned that Entergy Louisiana host a poverty summit and it may be an opportunity for partnership in the future.

Keith Cunningham, President of the Louisiana Housing Corporation shared several programs and initiatives offered through the Louisiana Housing Corporation, such as: Multifamily units, down-payment and closing assistance, and permanent supportive housing that can help support the work of this council. He continued to express the corporation’s commitment and desire to support this effort, share data and resources, and the organization’s goal of assisting families out of poverty through affordable housing. The Louisiana Housing Corporation also shared an example of using housing as a way of community development and community transformation through their housing project in East Carroll Parish.

It was noted during the meeting that the council should keep in mind racial disparities in addressing housing issues and shy away from creating affordable housing in segregated neighborhoods.

Discussions continued regarding funding for potential projects and initiatives that may come out of the Empowering Families to Live Well council. It was noted during the time of the Louisiana Solutions to Poverty work, the state had a budget surplus and TANF dollars were used to support anti-poverty initiatives and help support families. It became a unanimous goal of the council to free-up a percentage of TANF dollars to fund programs and projects to assist families in need. In addition, Sen. Barrow recommended that the council should also seek grant funding and use philanthropic efforts to support council initiatives.

The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance reported on the Louisiana Go Grant. The Louisiana Go Grant is a state grant program that assists students who can demonstrate financial need to pay for the cost of postsecondary education. The GO Grant is used to pay a portion of the cost of attendance at an eligible Louisiana institution. The challenge with the program is recipients of the Louisiana Go Grant families’ SNAP benefits are reduced when students go to college. Only ¼ of Louisiana students who need Go Grants actually receive them. Currently, Go Grants are funded for $28 Million. The program needs $100 million to meet the need of students who are eligible.

The Louisiana Department of Education shared a few of their subsidy programs for low income families and expressed one of their challenges is clients continuously changing residents and the difficulty in maintaining contact with clients due to those changes.

Lastly, Secretary Walters led the discussion on how the council will be structured to address a multifaceted of issues. It was mentioned during the discussion that addressing Tax Policy should be considered as an opportunity for this council. In addition, it was also brought to the Council’s attention to examine the benefits cliff in the TANF and STEP programs.

In closing, members requested to be sent the Louisiana Solutions to Poverty Report from Governor Blanco’s administration and the recently released United Way’s ALICE Report.

1. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:00PM.

 **Approved 3/6/2019**