

**Georgia Children’s Cabinet  
Full Committee Meeting  
Thursday, September 18, 2014 Minutes  
Full Cabinet: 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM  
The Governor’s Mansion, 391 W. Paces Ferry Road, Atlanta, GA**

**Attendees:** First Lady Sandra Deal, Commissioner Frank Berry (DBHDD), Dr. Ashley Willcott (OCA), Commissioner Brenda Fitzgerald (DPH), Commissioner Keith Horton (DHS), Corinna Magelund (Disability Services Ombudsman), Commissioner Avery Niles (DJJ), Commissioner Clyde Reese (DCH), Bonnie Holliday (State Charter School Commission), Erin Hames (Governor’s Office), Rick Dunn (GOCF), Martha Ann Todd (GOSA), Bobby Cagle (DFCS), Commissioner Amy Jacobs (DECAL), Eric John (CJCJ), Stephanie Blank (Blank Foundation), Representative Katie Dempsey (GA House of Representatives, District 13), Elaine Brown (Head Start Association), Senator Renee Unterman (GA Senate, District 45), Janice Haker (DECAL), Donna Hyland (Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta), Evelyn Johnson (GA Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics), Josephine Reed-Taylor (TCSG), Rick Ward (GA Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics), Matt Arthur (Rabun County Superintendent)

**Members Not in Attendance:** Dr. John Barge (DOE), Pat Willis (VOICES), James Whitfield (Cobb Circuit Juvenile Court), Karen White (Moody AFB), Tony Foskey (Tender Years Learning Corporation), Danielle Cotton (Parent Representative), Pedro Cherry (Georgia Power), Representative Amy Carter (GA House of Representative, District 175)

**Others Attending:** Katie Jo Ballard (DFCS), Ember Bishop (First Lady’s Office), Hayley Howell (GOCF), Andy Sunderland (GOCF)

Agenda Issue	Discussion	Conclusion/ Action to Take/Follow up
<b>Opening Remarks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The meeting was called to order by First Lady Deal. Introductions and welcomes were made.</li> <li>➤ First Lady Deal called for a motion to approve the minutes from the January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 Full Cabinet meeting.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The minutes were approved.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Approved</b>
<b>Child Welfare Reform Council Update</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ First Lady Deal stated that Stephanie Blank, the appointed chairwoman for the Child Welfare Reform Council, had an update on the council’s progress.</li> <li>➤ There has been media coverage of the Council, and additionally the Council’s website has full videos of their meetings, since transparency and accountability has been a big part of their mission.</li> <li>➤ The first four meetings of the Council have been spent on Child Protective Services, its shortcomings, and</li> </ul>	

- what needs to happen going forward.
- Stephanie Blank said that Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta CEO Donna Hyland had been looking at what training and policy issues can be addressed that will help support the mission of DFCS. Money is not always the issue.
  - Stephanie Blank said that Representative Wendell Willard is chairing the Council’s Judicial and Legislative Taskforce, looking at how the actual laws impact agencies’ ability to address issues facing children.
  - Stephanie Blank said that Director Melissa Carter of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center has been looking at best practices across the country, in an attempt to incorporate the lessons and experience of other programs across the state.
  - These three individuals chair Council subcommittees are charged with coming up with a set of recommendations, some of which are for policy. From these, the Council knows that technology will play a large role in reform going forward.
  - Stephanie Blank stated that technology should be helpful to a DFCS case worker out in the field, which is not the case currently. Ms. Blank highlighted an experience of Mr. Cagle in the field with a case worker where technology played an antagonistic role.
  - Stephanie Blank said that the training process for case workers needs to be strengthened and improved, as well as including a mentoring program for new/young caseworkers.
  - All of these issues are tied to a major issue facing child welfare, which is the individual caseload for caseworkers, Ms. Blank articulated.
  - Evelyn Johnson of the Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics asked how large of a role internships plays in DFCS at the moment.
  - Katie Jo Ballard said that DFCS is in the process of bringing internship programs back, especially a program that pays for students to get their Master of Social Work degree while working for the agency, which would amount to 150 positions.
  - Senator Renee Unterman stated that the salary of caseworkers is a large contributing factor for the high turnover rate of employees at DFCS.
  - Stephanie Blank said that it is important that DFCS support their caseworkers in both their personal and professional lives, and that a high turnover rate isn’t tied exclusively to a low salary.

- Donna Hyland highlighted a survey that was conducted of DFCS caseworkers recently that indicated seven key areas that employees said are important to them, such as caseworker training, supervisor training, caseload level, respect and treatment they receive.
- Stephanie Blank brought attention to ways that caseworker morale has been raised, such as Governor Deal writing a letter of commendation to exceptional employees.
- In the same vein, Stephanie Blank said that she asked Representative Willard if a similar letter of commendation could be offered from local public figures in other areas of the state, to which he confirmed that this would be possible.
- Bobby Cagle said that due to the confidential nature of cases, successful interventions into child abuse cannot be made public and therefore are never recognized. He suggested that letters of commendation would be a great way to provide this validation that caseworkers need.
- First Lady Deal brought attention to the Southern Journal Magazine provided to Cabinet Members, specifically regarding an article about being a foster child.
- Stephanie Blank encouraged Cabinet Members who are members of a faith-based organization, church, etc. to involve their community in the work the Cabinet is doing.
- First Lady Deal said that she highly recommends DFCS develop its mentorship program further, because the safety of individuals is very important, especially seemingly vulnerable case workers.
- Bobby Cagle confirmed that being a DFCS caseworker is indeed a very dangerous job at times, and 70% of caseworkers said that they have felt threatened either while on the job or in the office. DFCS is looking into furnishing their caseworkers with pepper spray.
- Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner Avery Niles said that it is important that DFCS works closely with local police departments, and said that DJJ is implementing tracking technology where managers can pull up on their laptop the location of their employees while they are in the field.
- The Executive Director of the Georgia Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics Rick Ward asked Bobby Cagle if there is some protocol for reporting and documenting threatening or violent altercations with caseworkers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bobby Cagle answered that there is no such documentation requirement, as one of the major issues facing caseworkers is that they already have too much paperwork to deal with. However, he said that they are considering this as a possibility. He also said that extensive surveying would also be a possibility.</li> <li>➤ Katie Jo Ballard shared her experience of riding along with a DFCS caseworker in the field, and how she was in a potentially life-threatening situation. Ms. Ballard said that these situations can very easily escalate out of control into violence, and this is everyday work for a caseworker.</li> <li>➤ Representative Katie Dempsey agreed that equipping caseworkers with pepper spray was a good idea.</li> <li>➤ The Department of Early Care and Learning’s Head Start State Director Janice Haker stated that her department is working on training materials for home visitors, such as DFCS caseworkers.</li> <li>➤ Evelyn Johnson asked if a consenting family who had success through DFCS could share their story publicly, thereby generating positive media attention for the work of DFCS.</li> <li>➤ Bobby Cagle said that he has pursued this, but that attorneys present often make the situation very difficult. They are looking at the legal nuances of this possibility.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Monthly Highlights</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Governor’s Office for Children and Family Government Liaison Hayley Howell updated the Cabinet on the work that GOCF and the Children’s Cabinet have done over the past several months, bringing attention the Monthly Highlight handout.</li> <li>➤ In June, the SPLASH Water Safety Campaign was started with a special event with the help of American Academy of Pediatrics, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and Georgia Power.</li> <li>➤ Over nearly 1,000 SPLASH posters have been sent out across the state. Department of Juvenile Justice has distributed many, as well as many copies that were emailed out to individuals and organizations.</li> <li>➤ “The Polar Bear That Couldn’t, Wouldn’t Swim,” is a book that taught water safety tips to children, which was sent out to libraries across the state.</li> <li>➤ This year alone, 159,145 Hallmark immunization cards have been sent out to hospitals around the state, and First Lady Deal and the Children’s Cabinet visited</li> </ul>	

	<p>many hospitals in support of child immunization. 272,500 cards have been sent out since the inception of the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In August, the Cabinet was able to visit Metro Regional Detention Center, Education Center, and the Office for Entry. Hayley Howell thanked Commissioner Niles for his help with the visits over the course of this month.</li> <li>➤ Ms. Howell thanked the Department of Public Health Commissioner Brenda Fitzgerald for her work on the SHAPE Initiative over the course of September’s Health Awareness Month. The First Lady and Cabinet visited schools across the state and saw the Power Up for 30 campaign in action. The Burgess Peterson Academy has an organic gardening project where every student plants a seed and helps raise chickens.</li> <li>➤ First Lady Deal brought up the fact that doctors are now saying that caretakers and parents should go get certain immunizations again, such as the whooping cough vaccination, because they can expire.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>October Pre-K Month</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Special Assistant to the First Lady Ember Bishop stated that February is Pre-K month for the Children’s Cabinet.</li> <li>➤ Ms. Bishop said that a kick-off event is currently being planned with the Department of Early Care and Learning and that she would like Cabinet members to attend. The event will take place either in Cobb or Gwinnett County, on Wednesday, October 1<sup>st</sup> at 9:00AM.</li> <li>➤ A schedule for the First Lady is being formulated which will cover about 25-30 counties.</li> <li>➤ As soon as the schedule is finalized, it will be sent to Cabinet members, who are encouraged to join in the events.</li> <li>➤ VOICES will have their Pre-K kickoff at Atlantic Station on Monday, October 6<sup>th</sup> at 9:30AM.</li> <li>➤ Ms. Bishop stated that First Lady Deal has read at almost 400 schools during her time as First Lady.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Fitzgerald updated the Cabinet on the “Talk with Me Baby” and a survey conducted at WIC clinics for word recognition and literacy. Of the sample population, 40% had adequate word recognition, but only 10% were able to use those recognized words properly. This indicates that there is a lot of work to be done in this area.</li> <li>➤ WIC clinics see roughly 50% of Georgia’s children, so the sample population can be seen as fairly</li> </ul>	

	<p>representative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ All videos and training materials have been completed for nutritionists at WIC clinics.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Fitzgerald’s First Year Report was recently completed. Elements of the report include data on brain development.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Fitzgerald said that she needs the help of Cabinet members to encourage schools to participate in the recent fitness initiatives.</li> <li>➤ Dr. Evelyn Johnson said that schools that participate in these fitness programs experienced a decrease in bullying.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Fitzgerald stated that Georgia won an award for most-improved state when it comes to infant mortality rate, for which they raised 10 places, from 43<sup>rd</sup> to 33<sup>rd</sup>.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Niles asked for figures on the decrease of bullying rates in schools that participated in Georgia SHAPE.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Fitzgerald said that she did not have figures with her.</li> <li>➤ Dr. Evelyn Johnson said that all of this information would be on the Georgia SHAPE website shortly.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Fitzgerald said she would get Commissioner Niles the data he requested, and he affirmed that school bullying was a severe issue that needed to be dealt with.</li> <li>➤ Representative Dempsey said that she had an upcoming town hall meeting related to the topic of bullying.</li> <li>➤ First Lady Deal said that it was extremely important that increased physical activity is included in every student’s day.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Monthly Highlights: November: Military/Veteran Appreciation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ First Lady Deal and Hayley Howell requested suggestions from the Cabinet for events that the Cabinet could participate in for November’s Military/Veterans Appreciation Month.</li> <li>➤ Representative Dempsey said that she knows of a “Youth Challenge” that takes place in November.</li> <li>➤ Rick Ward suggested visiting military bases or military hospitals in the State.</li> <li>➤ First Lady Deal suggested visiting the children of veterans and military personnel in schools around military bases.</li> <li>➤ Donna Hyland stated that Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta has a breakfast for veterans in November which is always well-received. She suggested that companies</li> </ul>	

	<p>and government agencies be encouraged to do a similar event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stephanie Blank said that Home Depot and JPMorgan Chase are both regular participants in veterans' events in November.</li> <li>➤ Erin Hames suggested a letter-writing campaign, something that the Governor's Office does.</li> <li>➤ First Lady Deal said that if any other member has suggestions to please email Ember Bishop or Hayley Howell.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Announcements and Celebrations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Janice Haker stated that 2014 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Head Start program.</li> <li>➤ Program Director of the Head Start Association Elaine Brown stated that she has been in contact with individuals who participated in the first year of the program, but would like to find more. If anybody encounters or knows of any alumni or teachers of the first year of the Head Start program, Ms. Brown encouraged them to contact her.</li> <li>➤ The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Commissioner Frank Berry reflected on the changing attitudes of society toward treatment, recovery, and rehabilitation, rather than simply building more prisons.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Berry shared his experience with a Cobb County Accountability Court, including how Governor Nathan Deal addressed over 1,000 attendees to the event.</li> <li>➤ Commissioner Berry recounted experiences of success with drug courts and treatment options in the juvenile justice system.</li> <li>➤ First Lady Deal told of her experience visiting the Paul Anderson Youth Home, and the success that is possible when youths are placed in an environment that encourages reform and personal growth rather than juvenile detention centers.</li> <li>➤ Stephanie Blank said that on Monday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, there will be an Early Education Summit with Georgia Public Broadcasting. Governor Deal will be there, as well as national experts to participate in discussions about early childhood education. Ms. Blank encouraged Cabinet members to attend.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Adjourn</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Full Cabinet meeting concluded at 10:20 AM</li> </ul>	

