**Florida Children and Youth Cabinet Meeting**

Monday, March 20, 2017

1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Florida State Capitol, Cabinet Room

400 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, 32399

**Meeting Summary**

Note: The following is a summary of the highlights of the proceedings and is not intended to be construed as a transcript. To obtain meeting materials, please visit [www.flgov.com/childrens-cabinet](http://www.flgov.com/childrens-cabinet).

**Attendance Summary**

Florida Children and Youth Cabinet members in attendance:

* Chair Wansley Walters
* Director Alan Abramowitz
* Secretary Mike Carroll
* Secretary Christina Daly (Fred Schuknecht)
* Nelson Diaz
* Director Zack Gibson
* Superintendent Sam Himmel
* Director Rodney MacKinnon
* Representative Gayle Harrell
* Judge Sandy Karlan
* Director Barbara Palmer
* Justice Barbara Pariente (Judge Jill Walker)
* Diana Ragbeer
* Secretary Justin Senior
* Commissioner Pam Stewart (Angelia Rivers)
* Steven Uhlfelder
* Victoria Zepp
* Tanya Wilkins

Staff in attendance:

* Lindsey Zander, Executive Director
* Matilda von Kalm

**Proceedings**

**Call to Order and Welcome**

Chair Wansley Walters called the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet (Cabinet) meeting to order at 1:09 p.m. and welcomed Cabinet members.

The roll was called by Lindsey Zander and a quorum was confirmed.

The Chair recognized the newest member of the Children and Youth Cabinet, Citrus County Superintendent Sandra “Sam” Himmel. Superintendent Himmel thanked the Cabinet for their welcome and introduced herself. She expressed her excitement to be on the Cabinet and to extend the focus of the Cabinet to school systems.

**Autism Navigator Presentation – Dr. Amy Wetherby, Director of the Autism Institute in the College of Medicine, Florida State University**

Dr. Amy Wetherby spoke on the advances of therapy and intervention in autism medicine. Dr. Wetherby’s work concentrates on families that do not have access to urban medical centers for diagnosis and treatment, and instead uses internet capabilities.

Dr. Wetherby discussed the cost of autism for families and their communities in medical and lifelong expenses. The Autism Institute believes that early diagnosis can be beneficial as it relates to therapy efforts to decrease the needs of children who have been diagnosed with autism, thus decreasing their expenses.

Children can be diagnosed with autism as early as 18-24 months, however most children are diagnosed between three and five years of age, specifically in areas that do not have access to medical institutes. Dr. Wetherby believes this is an issue that must be addressed.

She displayed statistics that show that in Florida, 75-80 percent of children that need special needs services go unnoticed. She explained that much emphasis is put on pre-school aged children, but these services must be expanded to infants and toddlers.

Dr. Wetherby introduced the First Words Project (www.FirstWordsPorject.com), which will be launching in April, 2017.

* The first two years of a child’s life are when developmental disabilities are best detected. Parents and teachers are the most critical in the development of young children.
* By training these parents and teachers to know when to screen children, children’s developmental disabilities can be caught earlier and treated earlier.
* The program also trains agencies and families to be encouragers and supporters by giving online tools and services.
* This care team expands from Home Visiting Programs to state agencies that regulate special need programs.
* Online courses are less than two minutes and they train non-medicinally trained adults in how to identify signs of learning and mental disabilities. The full eight-hour course was launched in 2015 and goes over core diagnostic features to early intervention basics.
* There is also a jumpstart option that is only an hour and gives the viewer an expedited course on signs of autism.
* The courses are free to Florida families; only families from out of state are charged.
* The website also contains resources for providers and parents for after diagnosis.

Dr. Wetherby stressed how important early detection is in order to help these children, and how these programs can assist the efforts of parents and teachers in knowing when to screen and how to identify symptoms. The website was designed for all families instead of just families with autistic children in the hopes that parents will use the information for their children regardless of if they are showing signs of learning or mental disabilities. An example of a campaign was “16 Gestures by 16 Months”, which Dr. Wetherby encourages Cabinet members to put on their own agency websites.

The website also provides milestones for social communication growth for parents and providers to use in order to measure what a typical child should be able to do at certain ages. Domains include gestures and meanings, and sounds and words. The videos also explain at what age these gestures and words should be happening developmentally. This will help with child neuroplasticity, in which children can practice social communication skills and be ready for preschool or kindergarten. The screener can also chart the child’s growth for each month so that progress can be shown with these skills. This screening is free if the child is screened with a contracted screening provider. There are approximately 10,000 users for Autism Navigator in 114 countries.

There is also a how-to guide for families, which encompasses guide books that explain milestones, autism impact, and ways to get started with early intervention even while the parent is waiting for an official diagnosis. 31 children tha went through these early treatment programs were followed throughout their k-12 schoolings, and 61 percent were still enrolled in general education at a higher rate than the state average at 42 percent.

Chair Zepp shared her experience with having an autistic child and commends the program. Director Palmer also asked the other agency heads to share this free course through their communication means and websites. Dr. Wetherby expressed her interest in partnering with state agencies on this educational program. Director Gibson thanked Dr. Wetherby for her presentation and recalled how the Cabinet’s mission is to make Florida the best state to raise a child, and how this program contributes to that goal.

Director MacKinnon expressed his appreciation of the partnership between the Office of Early Learning and this program, and the emphasis that this program has on early intervention. Judge Karlan suggested having a link to the website on the Children and Youth Cabinet website.

**Overview of Agency Key Legislative Initiatives**

*Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)*

Director Alan Abramowitz presented the GAL’s legislative initiatives:

* Salary increase for the paid staff that works directly with children and volunteers.
* HB 217/SB 60Keys to Independence: Program that is designed to provide youth in foster care access to driver’s education and a driver’s license. This program was authorized in 2014 as a three year pilot program; they would like to make this a permanent program.
* HB 151/SB 416 - Dogs in Court: Children in Dependency Court and adults with intellectual issues would be able to have a facility or therapy animal with them while testifying.
* HB 185/SB 64 – State Park Fees: The bill is to continue to recognize foster parents by giving these families free access to state parks and 50 percent off camping grounds, as well as an annual pass at the time of an adoption.

*Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA)*

Secretary Senior presented AHCA’s legislative initiatives:

* The administration has been focused on streamlining systems in which clients are served. This session, there is a bill to consolidate waivers so that patients do not lose services of their connections with providers.
* AHCA is also working to reorganize the Medicaid structure so that health plans are divided up across the state in a way that is more consolidated and sensible.
* AHCA would like to improve transparency in the healthcare system.
* Secretary Senior would also like to improve graduate medical residency slots, as they tend to stay where they complete their residency, attracting doctors to Florida.

*Department of Children and Families (DCF)*

Secretary Carroll presented DCF’s legislative initiatives:

* Substance exposed newborns: Legislation that would allow DCF to intervene if a parent is involved in a substance abuse treatment service, not just if the child tests positive for a substance.
* Children that are born into households that are already in active cases. The legislation would state that if a parent is deemed unfit to care for their current children, the newly born child would also go through dependency court to determine if the parent can take care of that child.
* Conditions for return: Adding new language regarding the capacity for the parent to take care of their child, rather than just meeting the state mandated requirements for the return of their child.
* DCF has proposed several changes that would continue the effort to better coordinate the care of children involved in the child welfare system.
* Legislative budget requests include increasing the funding for case managers and family emergency services providers. DCF also would like to request an increase in funding for substance abuse and mental health treatment, as many children who come into the child welfare system need these services.

*Department of Health (DOH)*

Dr. Philip presented DOH’s legislative initiatives:

* Increase funding for training for child screening as well as 3 FTE for newborn screens technicians.
* $1.7 million for the DOH Child Protection Teams, as additional children are mandated for assessment each year.
* $469,000 for treatment associated with additional testing, as well as additional funding to expand dental preventative care to all 67 counties.
* Additional funding for epidemiology testing in Florida to keep up with the daily outbreaks in child care centers.

*Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)*

Secretary Daly presented DJJ’s legislative initiatives:

* Free personal identification cards for youth that have been in the DJJ system so they can pursue jobs.
* Watching legislation regarding civil citations for minors.
* $10 million for residential programs and $4.7 million for evidence based services and to improve many of the residential areas that DJJ youth are housed in.

*Office of Early Learning (OEL)*

Director MacKinnon presented OEL’s legislative initiatives:

* $25 million in addition to federal funds to help 4,600 families.
* Provide VPK facilities with reimbursement for the resources they buy, which would equate to $50 per child.
* Aditional funding to increase Florida’s Childcare capacity.

*Florida Supreme Court*

Judge Walker presented the Florida Supreme Court’s legislative initiatives:

* Revisions for civil citations for minors and looking to expand it in situations where a youth is arrested, referred to a diversion program, and if successfully completed, the arrest will not show up on their criminal history, and it will not be public record.
* The Supreme Court is also looking to have the diversion programs be validated on evidence-based data.
* Direct filing for juveniles: where the juvenile would be able to have a pre-hearing in Juvenile Court before they are directly filed. They would also like to consider a post-court hearing at the discretion of the judge.

*Department of Education (DOE)*

Angelia Rivers presented DOE’s legislative initiatives:

* Provide incentives to high impact charter schools, which would serve disadvantaged students and promote high quality educational choice.
* Provide a county commissioner with direct authority regarding resources so that a school can return to normalcy faster after an emergency.

*Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)*

Director Palmer presented APD’s legislative initiatives:

* Individuals that are caretakers to be paid minimum wage. This would be a recurring fund.
* Rates that nurses are paid (which decreased). APD is asking for funding to increase the salaries of these nurses.
* Rate increase for the persons who need complex services. This would set a rate for those with dual diagnoses so that they can receive the services they need.
* Better oversight for clients who are in independent living situations, as currently they cannot intervene.
* $3.3 million to provide job training to disabled community members.

*House of Representatives*

Representative Harrell presented her legislative initiatives:

* Increase quality group and foster homes. This would be done through quality rating systems, which are established through quality standards that these group homes would have to follow.
* Federal Block Grant for Title IV: committee bill requesting a child welfare grant, aimed to help fund community based care organizations.
* Expressed concern over the fragmentation between the child welfare system services. Goal is to look at consolidating child welfare into a state-wide budget for agency resources in regards to child welfare services. Increase consistency across the state with budget requests for these services, as well as the transparency of these budget requests.
* HB 79, *Just Read Florida,* which is aimed at children who struggle with reading.
* HB 329 the safety of children who visit recovery residencies, such as increasing the security surrounding that child’s visitation.
* HB 369 deals with child protection in regards to sexual abuse and the expert witness aspect of the bill, where a child protective investigator can testify on behalf of a child in a sexual abuse or neglect case.

Judge Karlan would like to draft a letter to the Speaker, President and Governor that would identify the Cabinet’s nine priority indicators.

**Technology Workgroup Update-Chair Victoria Zepp**

Victoria Zepp, Chair of the Technology Workgroup, acknowledged the engagement shown in the workgroup by each of the agencies. She updated the Cabinet on the unique identifiers that are being considered to use to integrate the data from agencies to be able to better share data and track the children who touch different agencies once they come into the state system. She stressed that the workgroup is not creating new practices, but sharing the best practices used by organizations that deal with children and youth. Annie E. Casey KIDS COUNT has been present at workgroups, and many of the agencies involved in the Cabinet have shared their best practices. Researchers that deal with child welfare data have also attended the workgroup meetings to explain how they are modernizing data sharing between agencies. The workgroup aims to be a conduit to data sharing practices with the child welfare system.

**MOU Interagency Agreement Update**

Director Zack Gibson informs the Cabinet that the goal is to have a finalized document by the next cabinet meeting. He is seeking assistance from AHCA and other state agencies to review the information in the MOU to ensure that it is consistent and accurate.

**The Children’s Budget**

Secretary Carroll would like the state agency heads to reconvene regarding funds requested to improve services provided to children and youth. He would like to categorize where the services dollars are going, and then present this data to the legislature when asking for an increase in funding. He would like the categories to be broad enough so that they are explainable to members of the legislature.

Chair Walters is fearful that the legislature may believe the children’s budget is allocated too much money.

Chair Zepp mentions the Forum for Youth Investment, an organization that assists other children’s cabinets present their spending. She believes that this organization could help with the presentation of showing the return on the investment Florida puts in for their children.

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**Public Comment**

Chris Lolley with the Ounce of Prevention Fund thanked the Cabinet for their support of the Fund’s campaign. He also mentioned Children’s Week and the month of April being Child Abuse Prevention month. He thanked the Cabinet for participating in the events aimed at raising awareness of what child abuse prevention can do for the state of Florida. He passed out lapel pins for the prevention month to members of the Cabinet.

**Closing**

Children’s Week will be held March 25-31 and Chair Walters encourages all Cabinet members to attend.

* Teen Town Hall Meeting 10-11:30 am, Tuesday, March 28th.
* Press Conference, 12:00pm, Old Capitol, Tuesday, March 28.

The Cabinet is planning the All-Day Retreat held during summer 2017. A survey will be sent out to members to acquire dates that work for Cabinet members, as well as the timing and the location of the retreat. The event will be held at the beginning of the summer.

**Adjournment**

The Cabinet is adjourned at 3:46 p.m.