



The Commission on  
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

**CWCSEO**

Connecticut General Assembly

## **MINUTES**

### **CWCSEO ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2023**

**VIA ZOOM**

**PRESENT:** Alan Tan, Karen Jarmoc, Nancy Heaton, Penny Young, Joan Barere, Hilda Nieves, Sylvia Ho, and Ada Fenick.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Steven Hernández, Werner Oyanadel, Rosemary Lopez, Megan Baker, Thomas Nuccio, Michael Werner, and Melvette Hill

**GUEST:** Stephanie Thomas, CT Secretary of the State

Meeting was called to order at 10:03 AM on Thursday, April 13, 2023.

#### **WELCOME AND CONVENING REMARKS BY THE COMMISSION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Mr. Steven Hernandez, Executive Director of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity welcomed the advisory board members to the meeting and also welcomed and thanked our special guest who joined us as part of a tour that the Secretary of the State Thomas has been conducting around the state.

#### **OPEN STRATEGY DISCUSSION FEATURING SECRETARY OF STATE STEPHANIE THOMAS**

Secretary of the State Thomas informed us that she has been traveling the state doing a project that's called "Connecting Cut", which is a program she started a few weeks ago visiting Barber shops and Hair Salons talking about civic engagement and civic participation and it's been very popular.

She mentioned that in America we've been taught that our civic duty is to vote, and that time is not spent on teaching people what to do the other 364 days a year, and there's no real source to learn how your government is structured and functions. So, she is trying to do many different things including this project going to those locations where people in the community, all different types of people get together and trade stories. This series kicked off last month in New London. She is happy to be traveling around the state doing this work.



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Another event that she started doing is the family civic trivia events, they partnered last night with the Boys and Girls Club of Milford where about 40-50 people gathered. Parents and kids as young as seven learning about civics.

She has an open-door policy, and she can be reached at [stephanie.thomas@ct.gov](mailto:stephanie.thomas@ct.gov) if anyone has any good ideas about how to get different communities involved in the process beyond just voting but voter participation as well.

She answered several questions asked by the advisory board members.

### **BRIEF LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM SUBCOMMISSION POLICY ANALYSTS**

Thomas Nuccio reported on the school nutrition bill Senate Bill 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs To Provide Free School Meals To All Students. This bill started in the children's committee and is currently on the Senate calendar. It requires local and regional boards and feds to establish and operate a school lunch program to provide breakfast, lunch, and other meals free of cost to all students, regardless of their economic status. Several studies have indicated that free school meals have led to more positive health outcomes, and students develop stronger academic performance, and a decrease in behavioral issues in the school and out of school is seen.

Megan Baker reported on House Bill 6576 An Act Strengthening Support For Grandparents An Other Nonparent Relatives Raising Children. This bill increases the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) under the Department of Social Services (DSS) for families with a head of household that's either a grandparent or a nonparent caretaker relative and it provides them with monetary compensation, equal to the prevailing foster care rate. There are 47,000 homes in Connecticut that are multigenerational and a third of these have grandparents as the responsible head of household legal guardian.

Rosemary Lopez reported on Senate Bill 1178 An Act Expanding Connecticut's Paid Sick Days. This bill first started in the labor committee, it's now tabled to the Senate Calendar. This new law would strengthen Connecticut's existing paid sick days and provide all workers paid sick days regardless of the size of their employer. It would cover all private-sector employers and employees. It would also increase the maximum amount of hours an employee may accrue. The Coalition for Paid Sick Days has partnered with Working Families AFL-CIO and they will be



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having a big event coming up next week April 19<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Lopez will circulate the information to everyone.

Werner Oyanadel reported that his subcommission has led around the issue of early voting. There are three bills that they are looking at around early day voting Senate Bill 1057 which is the Act Concerning the Secretary of the State and Early Voting. This bill would establish early voting beginning in 2023. I would also establish the number of days and hours of, and implement procedures for the conduct of such early voting. It would also provide for same-day election and same-day primary registrations during periods of early voting, and require the Secretary of the State to undertake efforts to educate the public about early voting and train registrars of voters regarding the administration of early voting. Senate Bill 1064 An Act Concerning the Implementation of Early Voting and HB 5004 An Act Implementing Early Voting. The League of Women Voters of Connecticut has also been a really strong advocate in support of early voting

Michael Werner reported on Senate Bill 1024 An Act Concerning a Dementia Services Coordinator. This is a bill that the commission has testified on and has been working closely with Christy Koval of the CT Alzheimer's Association. The general idea is to recognize the prevalence of Alzheimer's and have a dedicated statewide coordinator position within the executive branch to help with risk reduction, early diagnosis, and prevention. Alzheimer's is a public health issue and not simply an aging issue. There are 80,000 people in Connecticut aged 65 and older who are living with Alzheimer's in Connecticut it's a growing concern. He invited every to attend on May 17<sup>th</sup> for Alzheimer's Advocacy Day in the Capital.

Melvette Hill reported on Senate Bill 4 An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs. This bill has some elements of renters rights but really that renters rights bill is in House Bill 6666 An Act Expanding Renters' Rights. Senate Bill 4 has about nine elements important to highlight is that it includes the prohibition of cold weather evictions which is between December and March of any year, and it also has limits on rental application related fees which is important. It limits late charges for overdue rent, this has to do a lot with some of the language justice pieces that they have been talking about. It also has a standardized rental agreement circulation, where the Department of Housing has to come up with a standardized rental agreement form that both landlords and renters can use in both english and spanish. A nice piece in the bill is about workforce housing development which is establishing state and local financial incentives for individuals and businesses to have certain rental units set aside designated for workforce populations that are low and moderate income. Another piece in this



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bill is that the Department of Housing is going to develop of course within preparations. If there's money to do it establish a pilot program to provide temporary housing to individuals experiencing homelessness. Finally an important component of this bill is establishing a ten member task force for studying converting underutilized commercial and retail properties into affordable housing. The commission will pushing to ensure that there are people with lived experience on the task force, who would be living in those places.

### **OVERVIEW OF KEY LEGISLATIVE ITEMS & FUTURE MOVEMENT ON PRIORITIES FROM COMMISSION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Mr. Hernandez informed everyone that there are three bills that have either been developed by the commission or have been invited to participate.

1. The Community-Based Bereavement and Grief Counseling bill, the commission has been asked to organize a community-based study on bereavement options and grief counseling options around the state. What people are doing? What they're accessing? It's not just for kids, its for families, adults, and for special populations. That reporting recommendations will be asked of the commission.
2. The Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Commission, it's something that the commission already serves on and serves as Co-Chair of the education component of the JJPOC. This year the JJPOC has really tried to focus on how it is that they break the pipeline that starts at the earliest ages. So, this isn't just about education but it's also about child development, early child psychology. There was a ban on suspensions and expulsions for the littlest ones for the 4- to 7-year-olds. There are two big exceptions to the bans. One where there is violence in the behavior or where there is activity or actions of a sexualized nature. The commission has undertaken that they will be providing guidance together with a group of advisers around the state providing guidance.
3. School Climate Bill, the school climate in the state of Connecticut is something that the commission has been thinking a lot about for many years. This bill really looks to evolve the way that we think about behavior.



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### **OTHER BUSINESS**

The Co-Chairs Alan Tan and Karen Jarmoc thanked Mr. Hernandez and the staff for a remarkable meeting.

They also informed everyone that they are committed in trying to fill the vacancies of the board members and are working with the legislative leaders.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting of April 13, 2023, adjourned at 11:19 am.