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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DIVISION OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
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Cindy Pitlock, DNP
Administrator

Nevada Children's Commission Full Commission Meeting Meeting Minutes

DATE: Friday, March 18, 2022

TIME: 10:30 A.M. - Adjournment

VIDEO CONFERENCE: [Click here to join the meeting](#)

TELECONFERENCE LINE: 775-321-6111

CONFERENCE ID: 106 975 643#

1. **Call to Order** – Justice Nancy Saitta, Justice Elissa Cadish, Dr. Cindy Pitlock
The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m. by Justice Saitta.

2. **Welcome and Introductions (Roll Call)- DCFS Staff**

Members Present:

By video: Justice Nancy Saitta, Justice Elissa Cadish, Dr. Cindy Pitlock, Judge Rebecca Burton, Brigid Duffy, Shannon Gildea, Dr. Jesus Jara, Judge Michael Montero, Kimberly Palma-Ortega, Senator Keith Pickard, Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner, Janice Wolf, Assemblyman Steve Yeager

Members Absent: Nancy Brune, Tim Burch, Judge Paige Dollinger, Amber Howell, Megan Miller, Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno, Shelia Parks, Judge William Voy, Judge Egan Walker

DCFS Staff: Elvira Saldana

Public: Jane Saint, Brian Hager, Kim Abbott, Dr. Colleen Morris, Dede Parker, Gwynneth Smith, Jamelle Nance, Lea Case, Linda Anderson, Lyman Legters, Zaide Martinez, Morgan Briscoe, Ron Murphy, Wanda Pena, Dr. Sheldon Jacobs, Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba

Roll call was taken, and it was determined a quorum of the Nevada Children's Commission was present.

3. **Public Comment and Discussion**

There was no public comment.

4. **For Possible Action:** Meeting Minutes from December 17, 2021- Justice Nancy Saitta
Justice Saitta asked commission members if there were any additions or corrections to the meeting minutes.

No recommendations were made.

Action: A motion was made by Senator Pickard to approve the minutes, seconded by Brigid Duffy, and carried to approve the minutes of December 17, 2021.

5. **For Information:** The Ackerman Center Presentation- Dr. Colleen Morris and Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba
- Provide information about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders; the different diagnoses, the diagnostic process, and the long-term effects and subsequent needs related to fetal alcohol exposure

Dr. Colleen Morris stated she has been practicing genetics and pediatrics in Nevada for over 30 years. Dr. Colleen Morris is happy to have the opportunity to provide the Commission with basic facts about the scope of the problem which includes the children who are prenatally exposed to drugs and alcohol. When people think of fetal alcohol syndrome, they think of the children who are born with birth defects. However, the children with the characteristic facial features only represent one aspect of the entire spectrum. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in the United States occurs in 5% of births. It is much more common than autism. The cause of fetal alcohol syndrome is alcohol consumption during the pregnancy. According to the CDC, in Nevada 50% of women childbearing age drink alcohol; 7.5% of pregnant women report drinking alcohol; 1.4% of pregnant women report binge drinking during pregnancy which is the most damaging to the fetal brain. Due to 50% of pregnancies being unplanned, many pregnancies are exposed prenatally to the damaging effects of alcohol before the woman realizes she is pregnant. In 2000 when a study was conducted, 17% of children entering foster care had documented prenatal alcohol exposure. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is the new title used and the umbrella term which describes the range of effects and can include birth defects, learning problems, and behavior problems with lifelong implications. Of the individuals referred with prenatal exposure to drugs to the Ackerman Center, 60% meet the criteria for a diagnosis of FAS. Nevada has had multidisciplinary clinics for the diagnosis of FASD since 2005. Prenatal alcohol exposure causes brain damage. The effects of FASD last a lifetime, however there is hope. If the diagnosis is made early there are strategies that work.

Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba stated the early prenatal effects damage critical areas of the brain affecting brain development causing permanent functional impairments. The effects on the fetus are dependent on the substances used or combination of substances, when the fetus is exposed to the substance and how often, and the mother's ability to metabolize the substances used. In infancy, infants will display sleep dysregulation, feeding problems, irritability, and developmental delay in all areas. In early childhood, in addition to the infant effects children are easily distractable, overly friendly to the point of being intrusive, have lack of danger awareness, talk a lot, and increased temper tantrums which are difficult to manage. In early school age, children display both the infant and early childhood effects plus some learning issues, poor social skills, difficulty learning from experiences/understanding consequences, difficulty retaining learned information, difficulty seeing past today, and ADHD symptoms. By middle and high school age, all the previous effects are displayed however they are getting worse. Youth have difficulty moving out of concrete thinking, are falling further behind peers socially and academically, they tend to be naïve, they do not understand risk awareness, they have behavioral problems, and the ADHD symptoms continue to worsen, and some mental health symptoms are noticed. As adults, all the previous effects are displayed plus adults start to show a pattern of repetitive unproductive ideas and activities, they have poor social skills and have difficulty making and keeping healthy relationships, they have difficulty living independently, and a much higher risk of alcohol and substance abuse problems. In this population, the risk of incarceration is 10-19 times higher than youth without FASD. The risk of serious suicide attempt is 19 times higher than the national norm. Their life expectancy is less. In a study conducted in 2018 at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, these individuals were looked across their lifespan

and they found an average individual consumes \$23,000 in care annually. These individuals need social supports, behavioral supports, daily living skills supports, mental health supports, academic supports, and most importantly caregiver supports. Prevention and awareness are critical since FASD is preventable. Identification and education through the multi-disciplinary clinics improve the outcomes for individuals. Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba asked if there were any questions.

Gwynneth Smith stated Dr. Sheldon Jacobs has forged a real link with the Ackerman Center on behalf of kids in foster care in Clark County which has been transformational for kids on the mental health court calendar. It is a profoundly underdiagnosed and unrecognized problem within the child welfare population. There is not yet a handle on the scope of it in child welfare nor a good ability to intervene the way they need to. Hopefully they can help them do more of what they do.

Kim Abbott stated she has a personal story from her experiences with the Ackerman Center working with a client which illustrates the importance of the services. Something needs to be done regarding the resources available. It is not acceptable for clients to have to wait for months or years to get in to get assessments. Kim Abbott believes, as a system, they are not well educated and well trained on addressing children with FASD. The behavioral health committee has talked about focusing and prioritizing FASD and getting additional education and services.

Senator Keith Pickard asked if the mortality rates are on all causes, not just a physiological cause.

Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba stated the study looked at the individuals with FASD and all the things which play into decreased lifespan.

Justice Saitta asked if FASD would be the cause of death on a death certificate.

Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba stated he did not think so.

Dr. Colleen Morris stated FASD would not be listed as the cause of death.

Janice Wolf asked if there is a way to diagnose FASD without a confirmed history.

Dr. Colleen Morris stated they use the American Academy of Pediatrics scheme for diagnosing FASD. They can make the diagnosis if enough of the criteria are met. However, if an individual has had normal growth and there is no prenatal exposure history then it is difficult to make the diagnosis based on the currently accepted criteria. Sometimes doing a social biopsy is helpful.

Dr. Sheldon Jacobs stated in the three and a half years since the Department of Family Services formed a partnership with the Ackerman Center, they have been able to streamline and get kids in quickly. Whenever they need something, the Ackerman Clinic never hesitates to assist with training or a consultation. Dr Sheldon Jacobs thanked the Ackerman Center for all they have done for their kids and families.

Dr. Cindy Pitlock stated there is an opportunity to support reliable contraception for women. It is a necessary intervention to affect change and move the dial. As a reminder, 50% percent of these pregnancies are unintended and if they can help women plan their pregnancies, some traction can be made.

Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner asked if there is any accounting for other costs besides health care costs.

Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba stated in that particular study it does include some of those costs as well. There are studies out there and Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba is happy to share those with the Commission.

Justice Saitta requested Dr. Mario Gaspar de Alba send the information to Elvira Saldana. Justice Saitta asked if OBGYNs and health care providers are screening for FASD and if so, are they doing it properly.

Dr. Cindy Pitlock stated it happens at the neonatal pediatric level, not the OBGYN level. The prevention piece of it would be at the family practice and OBGYN level. The most effective prevention is prior to pregnancy.

Kimberly Palma-Ortega commented she would be more than happy to share her connections to see if it can be spread out further.

Justice Stated requested Kimberly Palma-Ortega provide the contacts to Elvira Saldana. Justice Saitta suggested setting up a broad-based training.

6. For Information: Court Improvement Program Update- Shannon Gildea

- Provide updates on the Court Improvement Program

Shannon Gildea stated the American Bar Association is hosting two conferences the week of April 4th in McLean, Virginia. The Court Improvement Program (CIP) will host 8 of their dependency stakeholders to attend. An update on the conference will be provided at the next meeting. Nevada will be one of the four states participating in a Reasonable Efforts Study. The data will be collected between Clark and Washoe counties. Once the data is collected and the findings are presented, they will be shared and used to inform practice, policy, and court improvement efforts. All Program Improvement Plan (PIP) items associated with Team 3 have been completed and approved by the Children's Bureau. CIP is further researching Termination of Parental Rights which was an item on the PIP. Although it was achieved, there are some areas in which more research is needed. As a result of a discussion regarding the crisis with the Social Worker turnover at the October CIP Select Committee meeting, CIP will be hosting two, one-day presentations on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Professional Compassion Fatigue. The Juvenile Dependency Mediation Program is conducting a new mediator training March 28th through April 1st. They are looking to bring on a couple more mediators to help support the program. The dates for the annual CIC Summit are September 21st through September 23rd and it will be in Reno.

7. For Information: Updates from Committees

- Behavioral Health Committee- Gwynneth Smith, Dr. Sheldon Jacobs, Kim Abbott, Dr. Joe Haas, Dr. Domonique Rice

Gwynneth Smith reported the committee has been discussing how the committee can be used as a central repository of information and issues from different agencies and entities on youth mental health. The committee has collected the annual reports from the 3 children's mental health consortiums and will be reviewing them. At the last meeting, Dr. Joe Haas reviewed priorities he had identified for the committee when he was the Chair. Dr. Sheldon Jacobs made the connection with the Ackerman Center to have them present at today's meeting. Dr. Domonique Rice has made some connections with the rural partners. The committee hopes to have some DCFS partners at the next meeting to provide their perspective regarding youth mental health and the crisis they are experiencing in their jurisdictions. Gwynneth Smith reported because of the growing conversations with Kim Abbott, Jill Marano, and Dan Musgrove they determined a joint letter would be written and request a partnership from the state to have an ongoing dialogue on the issues. The letter was drafted and sent last September. It resulted in a series of broad monthly taskforce meetings on the issue of youth mental

health in Clark County. The first meeting was held on September 23rd and they have occurred monthly thereafter.

Kim Abbott stated the meetings have become very robust and include every level of state leadership. One of the challenges they have been looking at is looking how to break the issue into immediate, medium, and long term goals. A medium goal example they have been working on is how they leverage federal dollars, how ARPA funds can be used to build out programs and address some of the issues. A long-term goal is Medicaid reform. The meetings occur monthly. In between the monthly meetings the Core Workgroup meets every Monday and specific topics are delved into from the broader meetings. One of the best things they have accomplished is the open lines of communication.

Gwynneth Smith agrees the building of relationships and the ability to communicate consistently has been crucial and a success. Gwynneth Smith stated some items the Taskforce has accomplished are DCFS has designated a Psychiatric Social Worker to attend the Clark County mental health court and crossover calendar and the Aging and Disability Services Division has forged a partnership with Child Haven to help identify kids who may present with intellectual disability. Members of the Taskforce have been invited to participate in Medicaid planning sessions regarding discussions for a children's health service initiative. The state and county are working together to utilize the buildings on the Oasis campus to create different tiers of care for children. Dede Parker, Administrator of the Specialty Court Programs in Clark County, wrote and got a grant approved from APRA funding to assist with kids who need specialized residential placements in the mental health court and crossover calendar.

Dede Parker stated the grant is focused on a wide variety of residential treatment services for youth. They are hoping to target any youth within the justice system.

Gwynneth Smith stated there are still many challenges. As a state, there continues to be a mental health workforce development issue.

Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner commended everyone on the progress made.

Dr. Cindy Pitlock commented she could not be more thrilled about the collaborative relationship they are having, forming, and strengthening. Dr. Cindy Pitlock expressed her gratitude.

Dr. Jesus Jara asked if it was possible for the Clark County School District to have a representative be a part of the collaboration discussion.

Justice Saitta stated yes.

- Child Welfare Committee- Megan Miller, Tim Burch, Amber Howell, Judge Paige Dollinger, Judge Stephanie Charter, Shelia Parks

Justice Saitta informed Amber Howell was unable to attend today's meeting. Justice Saitta requested Amber Howell be noted as an excused absence.

Brigid Duffy reported Megan Miller is not in attendance.

Justice Saitta requested a report be submitted by all committees.

- Education Committee- Nancy Brune, Kimberly Palma-Ortega, Dr. Jesus Jara, Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner, Janice Wolf

Kimberly Palma-Ortega stated there hasn't been a meeting.

Janice Wolf commented there was discussion about having designees on the committees. The committee should be reviewed and regrouped.

Justice Saitta stated Nancy Brune has taken a new position however she has asked to remain. She will be kept at some capacity which has not yet been formally designated. Justice Saitta asked the committee members who would like to volunteer to be the Chair.

Janice Wolf stated she would.

- Juvenile Justice Committee- Judge William Voy, Judge Egan Walker, Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno, Senator Keith Pickard, Assemblyman Steve Yeager
- Elvira Saldana reported the committee has not met since the last full Commission meeting.

Justice Saitta stated the Co-Chairs would discuss reconstituting a Chair on the Juvenile Justice committee.

8. For Information: COVID-19 Awareness

- Discuss and provide updates on available resources relating to COVID efforts
There were no updates.

Justice Saitta stated the agenda item will remain on the agenda for one more meeting.

9. For Possible Action: Discuss and Decide Upon Next Steps– Justice Nancy Saitta

- Assign Tasks to Committee Members (if needed)
Committee members to email Elvira Saldana, Justice Saitta, Justice Cadish, or Dr. Cindy Pitlock if they are a member of any other commissions/committees and identify what the Commission should be broadening its agenda to.
- Specify Agenda Items for the Next Meeting
No recommendations were made.
- Confirm Next Meeting Date/Time
 - i. Friday, June 17, 2022 at 10:30 a.m.

Brigid Duffy commented Dr. Jesus Jara still needs to appoint someone to attend the education committee meetings. Brigid Duffy reported most of the cases increasing in violence intensity are children who had recent mental health stays and there is a disconnect in communication between hospitals and the school district. The children ultimately end up in the juvenile justice system. Brigid Duffy suggested having a discussion on transition planning from hospital stays. Some of those cases need to be looked into to figure out how as a community they can do better to protect other children at school and protect the child who is having the emotional issues from ending up in the jail system.

Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner echoed Brigid Duffy's concerns. It is troubling to see several unmet mental health needs being framed as school discipline issues. Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner would like to join Brigid Duffy in calling for prioritizing and continue to prioritize this issue.

Justice Cadish commented if substance abuse and mental health issues can be addressed, hopefully they can avoid having those issues become juvenile justice and criminal justice issues.

10. Public Comment and Discussion

There was no public comment.

11. Adjourn

A motion was made by Justice Cadish to adjourn, seconded by Dr. Cindy Pitlock, and carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:07 p.m.