

Steve Sisolak
Governor

Richard Whitley, MS
Director



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Division of Child and Family Services
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Ross Armstrong
Administrator

**Nevada Children's Commission
Full Commission Meeting
Minutes**

DATE: Friday, December 18, 2020

TIME: 10:30 AM

LOCATION:

This meeting will be conducted via video conference and teleconference options listed below, in accordance with Governor Sisolak's Declaration of Emergency Directive 006; Subsection 1; The requirement contained in NRS 241.023 (1) (b) that there be a physical location designated for meetings of public bodies where members of the public are permitted to attend and participate is suspended.

Governor Sisolak's Declaration of Emergency Directive 006 shall remain in effect for the duration of the current state of emergency, unless terminated prior to that date by a subsequent directive or by operation of law associated with lifting the Declaration of Emergency, pursuant to Directive 029, Section 4.

VIDEO CONFERENCE: <https://call.lifesizecloud.com/6645500>

TELECONFERENCE LINE: 1-312-584-2401

EXTENSION: 6645500

1. Call to order- Justice Nancy Saitta, Justice Elissa Cadish, Ross Armstrong

The meeting was called to order at 10:33 a.m. by Justice Saitta.

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

Members Present: Justice Nancy Saitta, Justice Elissa Cadish, Nancy Brune (phone), Brigid Duffy, Dr. Jesus Jara, Amber Howell, Shannon Gildea, Megan Miller, Judge Michael Montero, Kimberly Palma-Ortega, Shelia Parks, Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner, Janice Wolf

Members Absent: Ross Armstrong, Margaret Crowley, Senator Marilyn Dondero-Loop, Valerie Fujii, Tim Burch, Judge Cynthia Lu, Assemblywoman Daniele Monroe-Moreno, Senator Keith Pickard, Judge Frank P. Sullivan, Judge William Voy, Judge Egan Walker, Assemblyman Steve Yeager

DCFS Staff: Elvira Saldana

Public: Valerie Balen, Wanda Pena, Linda Anderson, Cynthia Carstairs, Zaide Martinez, Abbie Frierson, Bailey Bortolin, Ron Murphy, Jane Saint, Jill Marano, Dr. Michael Maxwell

Justice Saitta informed Dr. Jesus Jara and Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner are newly appointed members to the Commission. Dr. Jesus Jara is the Superintendent for the Clark County School District (CCSD) and Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner is the Superintendent for Washoe County.

3. Public Comment and Discussion:

Jane Saint from Nevada CASA stated she is present.

Valerie Balen from JK Belz and Associates stated they have worked on releasing a kids and family report about the effects of the pandemic on children and they would like to have it considered as an agenda item.

Kimberly Palma-Ortega congratulated the Commission for adding the education component. Education is often left out of other Commissions/Boards/Councils.

Cynthia Carstairs from the Children's Cabinet stated she is participating as public.

4. For Possible Action: Meeting Minutes from September 18, 2020

Megan Miller stated she was not at the meeting and she was listed as present.

The approval of the meeting minutes was tabled.

5. For Information: Status of Evictions Presentation- Bailey Bortolin

Bailey Bortolin stated she is the Policy Director for the Legal Service Providers. Evictions has been their big emergency of the year they have been trying to navigate. When the pandemic first hit, evictions were shut down at the justice court level. It was followed by the Governor's first eviction moratorium which prevented almost all cases with a health and safety exception from proceeding through a court room. It then turned into a gradual lifting over the summer by types of evictions which lifted the final level of nonpayment of rent evictions on October 15th. During that time, the Guinn Center did some research and in July they found that 272,000-327,000 Nevadans were at risk of eviction. In August, the number of evictions had increased to over 400,000. A new order has been issued by the Governor. When the last order lifted on October 15th, there was hope the federal government protections which had been renewed by the CDC would help get through the transition. However, it was discovered quickly the CDC protections were inadequate and were not protecting people the way they were written. It was not legal language and it was not specific to Nevada law. It led to mass evictions. In November of 2019, the Las Vegas Justice Court had 2,387 evictions and November of this year, there were over 4,263 granted evictions. The 4,263 cases are ones that fell through the cracks of three layers of protection. The Eviction Mediation Program was stood up and is connecting people with the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) and rental assistance. The Governor's new order is set to be in place through March 31st. It is not like the last moratorium and it is more of an eviction defense available to people. If an individual qualifies, they will need to fill out a declaration and provide it to their landlord. The landlord can challenge it if they have evidence they are lying, the house is being foreclosed upon or a circumstance they believe they should be able to move forward with. What has caused confusion in the evictions cases is, people who have provided the declaration to their landlords think they are ok and when they receive the eviction notice they do not respond. By not responding, under Nevada law their eviction can be granted, and they discover it when the Constable comes to their door to physically remove them. They are doing everything they can to educate the community, they still have to respond when an eviction notice is received, and they must file an answer with the court. Things are not great; however, they are in a better place since the Governor has created a stronger eviction defense. They are hopeful there will be a better plan and more rental assistance in the federal package. The cliff has been kicked down the road a little bit if the community education can be accomplished to protect people. It leads to a March 31st cliff where we are back in the same position as we were, where we have hundreds of thousands of people who are unsure how they will become current on rent.

Justice Saitta asked if any of the numbers include demographic information of how many of the families being evicted have minor children.

Bailey Bortolin replied she is not aware of them having that information.

Justice Saitta requested Bailey Bortolin to gather information she may have and a fact sheet or frequently asked questions relating to the process, to send to Elvira Saldana for dissemination to the Commission members.

Bailey Bortolin replied she does have a document and will send it out. It is Southern Nevada centric now and she will include contact information for other areas.

Justice Saitta asked if it would be the same process statewide.

Bailey Bortolin replied only the specific justice court processes would be different. Judge Melissa Saragosa from the Las Vegas Justice Court is in the process of creating an administrative order which would create the court process for the Governor's new order. The hope is they will have buy in from all the justice courts to have a uniform process.

Justice Saitta asked Justice Cadish if an inquiry could be made to the President of the Limited Jurisdiction group.

Justice Cadish replied they can try to get some education together.

Justice Saitta stated she would talk separately to Justice Cadish about it.

Amber Howell stated there was mention of people who end up experiencing homelessness and not having places to go. It is not the case in Washoe County. Washoe County invested 14.7 million dollars into refurbishing and rehabbing 12 buildings on the Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services campus. It is now home for families, women, seniors, and a day care. The number of individuals who end up in the shelter due to evictions can be provided, as well as how many of their child welfare cases are lacking housing. Washoe County has a robust housing branch and anyone who has been evicted, immediately gets a diversion case manager assigned which assists with locating housing and sustainability.

Bailey Bortolin commented Washoe County has handled it differently.

Judge Michael Montero stated he does not deal with evictions however he does have participants in his treatment court who have taken the necessary steps to protect themselves from eviction and are now facing massive past due rent. They do not have a legal aid provider in Winnemucca. Judge Michael Montero asked who they could contact in the rural community to see if CARES act dollars may be available to provide them with past due rent assistance.

Bailey Bortolin replied the Nevada Rural Housing Authority has been administering the rental assistance program in the rural areas.

Judge Michael Montero commented he is a new member of the Nevada Interagency Council on Homelessness and he has not heard much discussion come up on evictions and rental assistance in that council. It might be an opportunity to educate through the council.

Bailey Bortolin stated she would be happy to reach out to them. The biggest problem they are encountering is reaching people who live in weeklies to educate them and let them know there is help available.

Justice Cadish acknowledged Dr. Jesus Jara had joined the meeting. Justice Cadish asked if there was any insight as to what has kept people from getting in the Eviction Mediation program.

Bailey Bortolin stated there is conversation as to whether they should continue with the program and how, since the dollars it is currently funded with need to be allocated by December 31st. The biggest barrier of the structure of the system is they can only reach those tenants who know to file an answer with the court.

Justice Cadish asked if Volunteer Attorneys for Rural Nevadans (VARN) is picking up some advice related to this.

Bailey Bortolin replied she believes VARN service population is more specific to seniors and victims of domestic violence. However, Nevada Legal Services has rural branches.

Megan Miller asked if there is any recourse for families who have an eviction or multiple evictions on their record, or if it is something potentially a longer-term problem for them to be able to find housing in the future.

Bailey Bortolin replied it has been one of her biggest concerns and something they are aware of. There is an eviction record sealing process and individuals must show their circumstances have changed. Bailey Bortolin informed she is looking to see if there is a way to clear all pandemic related eviction records for the Legislation Session.

Nancy Brune stated in response to Justice Saitta's question, the Clark County Department of Social Service is helping with the Clark County Housing Assistance Program and they produce a weekly report which breaks down by different demographic variables, who has applied and received rental housing.

Justice Saitta requested the demographic information be put together to maybe add as a subtopic under this update for the next meeting.

Nancy Brune stated she would be more than happy to prepare the information and send it out before the next meeting.

Justice Saitta asked Judge Michael Montero to provide the information to the council he is on.

Judge Michael Montero replied he would be happy to.

Justice Saitta stated she misidentified Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner as being with the Washoe County School District. She is with the Children's Advocacy Alliance and an essential partner for what the Commission is doing. Justice Saitta stated derived from what Megan Miller stated she sees an education issue for the family division judges and requested Megan Miller work with Justice Cadish and herself.

Kimberly Palma-Ortega commented she would be happy to help with work relating to Individualized Education Programs.

6. For Information: Overview of the Nevada Commission on Mentoring- Dr. Michael Maxwell
Dr. Michael Maxwell informed he is the Chair for the Nevada Commission on Mentoring (NCOM). The Commission was established in 2017 with the passage of Assembly Bill 144 for the purpose of supporting and facilitating mentorship programs in the state. It was revised in 2019 under Assembly Bill 235. The membership includes representatives from the Clark County and Washoe County School Districts. The Commission has developed a strategic plan. In Dr. Jesus Jara's Focus 2024 there are some goals for increasing the mentors being involved with the Clark County School District. Dr. Michael Maxwell asked Dr. Jesus Jara why he included mentoring as part of his long-term strategic plan.

Dr. Jesus Jara stated the research is clear there is a critical need for every child to find somebody at a school to support them, get to know them and connect them.

Dr. Michael Maxwell stated the duties of the Commission are to award grants to mentorship programs, enter public-private partnership with businesses, establish model guidelines for mentor programs, and develop capacity building grants for mentoring programs. Each month the Commission provides an opportunity for mentoring programs to spotlight their programs. The Commission is looking to enhance partnerships within Nevada's private business and industry.

Brigid Duffy stated one of the reasons she thought it was a great idea to explain the work NCOM does is due to there being a lot of missing pieces and not everyone is aware of what is available. There is a lack of mentoring groups in the rural areas. More of these groups need to be brought in as the Commission's advisory team.

Dr. Michael Maxwell stated some next steps for NCOM are to develop a communication and fundraising plan, planning and hosting a mentoring conference, and seeking ambassadors for the Legislative Session. The Commission's ask is for there to be regular communication with the Children's Commission, help them identify resources to help meet their goals, and any other ways the Children's Commission could work with NCOM.

Justice Saitta stated when the Co-Chairs meet, they will discuss how to bring Dr. Michael Maxwell on to the Children's Commission in a meaningful capacity. Justice Saitta asked Elvira Saldana to add Dr. Michael Maxwell to the email distribution list in the meantime. The Children's Commission will provide information and assistance as they are able to.

7. For Possible Action: COVID-19 Awareness

Discuss available resources relating to COVID efforts:

Justice Saitta stated in the last meeting, the Commission learned about available resources. This agenda item is provided for an update for open discussion for the need for resources and/or access to resources anyone has discovered since the last meeting. Justice Saitta asked Commission members if anyone would like to provide an update on resources available to assist with COVID related issues for kids and families.

Amber Howell stated they have struggled with visitation. Due to social distancing requirements, limited capacity and disinfecting mitigation efforts, the number of visits was going to be decreased by 50% at the Family Engagement Center. They applied for CARES funding to place tents outside for families to continue visiting. Laptops were purchased for foster children. Foster parents were provided with a stipend in September and November for extra activities, to buy toys or learning devices the children may need, and to show appreciation.

Justice Saitta asked Amber Howell if it was possible to provide a list of the initiatives mentioned.

Amber Howell replied she would send the list.

Jane Saint commented she participated in a meeting and Immunize Nevada presented on the vaccine. Jane Saint offered to provide contact information to the group.

Dr. Jesus Jara stated this year more children have been lost to taking their lives in the first six months of school than all of last year. In late October, twelve schools were identified, and they started a universal screener for social emotional. Out of 8,000 children who took the survey, 796 came on campus to receive support and family assistance. Of the 796, there were 16 they did suicide ideation. Another initiative is through artificial intelligence on the Chromebooks provided to students. An alert is received by the school district if the student searches words on how to commit suicide and law enforcement is sent to their home. The universal screener

has been expanded to 66 schools and it is being rolled out slowly and carefully. It is also available for staff. Each school has a Multi Leadership Team which is finding kids needing extra support and bringing them to the campuses following social distancing and practices. Wellness checks are also being conducted. The role of staff such as police officers has shifted to more of a social worker mindset to help kids at home. Truancy Officers and Security Monitors are being trained to go and provide assistance.

Justice Saitta stated the Chairs will consider how the Commission can support the efforts of the school district and heighten awareness. Justice Saitta asked what, if any referral from the school district team is made to social services.

Dr. Jara replied they work closely with The Harbor and other agencies to provide resources to help families.

Amber Howell stated they have regular meetings with the school district. One of the things they have struggled with is lack of staff. This week they started assisting the school district with contact tracing. In Washoe County, they are not seeing an increase in suicide rates. There is also a process in place for teachers if they identify something through distance learning.

Brigid Duffy commented it is an overwhelming task for the school district. There are some things which are not child related they must struggle with, however together it can be figured out in the best interest of the kids.

Janice Wolf stated the Children's Attorneys Project (CAP) in Clark County has an Educational Advocacy Program. The program works with low income parents to help them advocate for their children.

Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner commented she would find it helpful to hear from each of the presenters, the impacts to children relating to the issues discussed.

Justice Saitta asked Dr. Jesus Jara if CCSD has demographic information relating to suicides.

Dr. Jesus Jara stated they do have the information by race. They must be careful in identifying and releasing the information.

Justice Saitta requested appropriate information by Dr. Jesus Jara be provided to Elvira Saldana. Justice Saitta asked Amber Howell and Brigid Duffy if they have the demographic information Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner asked about.

Abbie Frierson stated they do have statistics and can provide them. Information on what they are doing in terms of suicide prevention and COVID related issues can be provided as well.

Justice Saitta asked Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner if it helped with her question.

Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner replied it did. Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner stated anything that would help in understanding the nuisances so as they think about how to work across the state to ensure a safety net or resources for children and families, there may be some things happening that allow to bring other partners to the table or an opportunity to convene a community discussion. Responses from a survey indicate nearly a quarter of families with children are at risk of eviction or foreclosure.

Justice Saitta requested Abbie Frierson, Dr. Jesus Jara and Amber Howell provide information to respond to what Dr. Tiffany Tyler-Garner asked for. Justice Saitta asked Commission members to be prepared to provide an update on as many statistics as are appropriate to answer the questions and concerns of the Commission. Every effort will be made to get as much information out as possible and to convene.

Justice Cadish commented it is daunting to hear about all the issues discussed without talking about education itself and what the impact on children's education will be.

Justice Saitta asked if there were any other questions or comments relating to COVID awareness.

Brigid Duffy commented Clark County Department of Family Services partners have been doing a lot of great work for kids and foster parents.

Nancy Brune asked Dr. Jesus Jara what percentage of the school police officers have been deployed for the wellness checks and what additional training they have received.

Dr. Jesus Jara stated he would need to obtain the information as to how many have been deployed and the training they have received.

Elvira Saldana noted for the record, quorum was met after Amber Howell and Dr. Jesus Jara joined the meeting.

Justice Saitta asked if there were any additional questions or comments.

Kimberly Palma-Ortega asked Dr. Jesus Jara if there is a direct contact for Parole for kids who are discharged from the facilities, how the transition into distance learning is being affected and what is the outcome of the rollout plan on how they are going to address those in the juvenile system with their education.

Dr. Jesus Jara replied there are constant conversations with Brigid Duffy and Jack Martin. CCSD staff coordinate with probation as well.

Brigid Duffy commented CCSD has a group that liaisons with Spring Mountain Youth Camp when they come out of facilities and back into school. On the parole side, Brigid Duffy is unsure who the contact is for Youth Parole.

Kimberly Palma-Ortega commented she sits on a Parent Advisory Committee. The Committee is still working on how online learning will be rolled out. There is a gap from probation into parole.

Brigid Duffy commented it is a great example of the Commission. These are things we need to make sure we are filling the gaps for kids and having people who are committed to ensure things work. Parole kids should not get left behind.

Dr. Jesus Jara stated it may be an opportunity to share the work the School Justice Partnership is doing at a future meeting.

Justice Saitta stated the Co-Chairs will identify topics for the lunch and learn sessions based on what was discussed. If there are any suggestions for ideas, topics or presenters to be a part of a lunch and learn session, please provide to Elvira Saldana for consideration.

8. For Information: Legislative Affairs- Ross Armstrong
This agenda item was tabled.

9. For Possible Action: 2020 Workplan
The 2020 Workplan was tabled.

10. For Information: Updates from Committees

Justice Saitta requested an update be provided from each committee to Elvira Saldana to report at the next meeting.

11. For Possible Action: Discuss and Decide Upon Next Steps

- Assign Tasks to Committee Members (if needed)
- Specify Agenda Items for the Next Meeting
- Confirm Next Meeting Date/Time

The next meeting date for the Children's Commission will be Friday, March 19, 2020 at 10:30 a.m.

12. Public Comment and Discussion:

Brigid Duffy commented in the Eighth Judicial District they have an issue regarding their court system. The Clark County Department of Family Services and herself are having a difficult time with lines of communication over how they are operating the court system, specifically court orders. The lack of communication from their court is causing some delays in permanency to children. Processes are holding up permanency for children. Brigid Duffy requested help from the Commission in getting judges to communicate with them.

Justice Saitta stated she has an added concern with the number of newly elected judicial officers in the Family Division and the need for education is going to be of a highest priority. A separate meeting will be convened with Megan Miller, Justice Cadish, Brigid Duffy, Abbie Frierson, Jill Marano, and Justice Saitta to discuss issues, next steps and report back to the Commission.

Justice Cadish thanked Brigid Duffy for bringing the issue up. It will be discussed to determine what can be done.

Kimberly Palma-Ortega stated if there is a need for an additional voice to share the concern, she would be more than happy to lend a hand.

13. Adjourn

A motion was made to adjourn by Judge Michael Montero, seconded by Brigid Duffy, and carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:51 p.m.