

Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet
Meeting Minutes
July 22, 2025- Zoom Meeting

Attendance: Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, Commissioner Beth Bye, Holly Williams, Dr. Shante Hanks, Marc Camardo, Lesley Mara, Karen Pascale, Renee Klienman, Louis Tallarita, Jaclyn Valley (Marsha Guthrie proxy), Eliot Brenner, Patricia Bryant-Beausoleil, Karen Rainville, Edie Reichard, Caroline Austin, Sharon Walker, Cris Jimenez, Shelly Nolan, Dr. Nicole Taylor, Adrean Enrique Rodriguez, and Melvette Hill

A. Welcome New Members/ New Positions

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz welcomed cabinet members and members of the public. Several leadership announcements were made by Commissioner Beth Bye. Sam Reinstein, formerly with the federal Administration for Children and Families, was introduced as the new Chief Operating Officer of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Michelle Cook was named the agency's first Ombudsman, providing families and providers with a direct point of contact for concerns and feedback. Two new Cabinet members also joined: Cris Jimenez, representing the Parent Cabinet, and Dr. Nicole Taylor from the Department of Children and Families' Behavioral Health and Well-being division.

B. Recent Events

Christina Morales, 2Gen Statewide Coordinator announced that the Two-Generational (2Gen) Initiative marked its 10th anniversary of advancing family economic mobility through cross-agency alignment. Karen Pascale, Head Start Collaboration Office Director, announced that Head Start celebrated 60 years of serving families in Connecticut, with 22 programs statewide providing preschool and early learning services to more than 5,700 children last year. An event was held in Torrington to celebrate this milestone. Luz Rivera, Program Manager for Help Me Grow announced that the Help Me Grow program hosted its 16th national forum in Hartford.

C. Feedback on Care for Kids Policies

Updates were provided on Care for Kids, the state's child care subsidy program funded through the federal Child Care Development Fund. Enrollment has expanded to 23,000 children—up from 16,000 in 2019—but is capped due to budget limits. Currently, more than 3,200 families representing 4,200 children are on the waitlist, with the program enrolling families who applied as far back as January. To improve transparency and responsiveness, OEC has developed a new family-friendly policy manual and launched a public comment portal to gather input from parents and providers. Despite an additional \$34 million in state funding to maintain current capacity, no new federal funds have been provided, and concerns remain about how federal immigration policies may impact access.

D. Cabinet Member Updates

The Department of Housing shared progress from the Interagency Council on Homelessness, now codified in legislation, which is working to expand both affordable and specialized housing for vulnerable populations. With new representation from the Department of Children and Families, the Cabinet also reinforced its commitment to integrating behavioral health into early childhood services.

E. Legislative Update and Endowment Bill

Commissioner Beth Bye gave an overview of the legislative session and the recently passed Early Education Endowment fund.