

Minutes (for review and confirmation at next meeting, February 2021)

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

*Meeting convened by Senator Hans Zeiger and Dept. of Social and Health Services Secretary Cheryl Strange*

**Quorum met by task force members (or designee) in attendance as follows:**

*Jim Baumgart, Rep. Michelle Caldier, Cecil Daniels (for Diane Klontz), Sen. Jeannie Darneille, Sen. Manka Dhingra, Erin Frasier, Rep. Mia Gregerson, Rep. Christine Kilduff, Mark Kucza, Rep. Gina Mosbrucker, Nam Nguyen, Daisye Orr, Tim Probst, Nicole Rose, Maria Siguenza, David Stillman, Cheryl Strange, and Sen. Hans Zeiger.*

**Guest Presenters & Additional attendees:**

*Michael Althaus, Anmarie Aylward, Sujatha Branch, Kwesi Booker, Jennifer Dillinger, Dawn Eychaner, Sarah Garcia, Diane Giannobile, Steve Grilli, Kathleen Harvey, Joe Holiday, Drayton Jackson, Susan Kavanaugh, Lianna Kressin, Allison Krutsinger, Claire Lane, Laurie Lippold, Claire Lane, Ami Magisos, Alexis Marx, Alison Mendiola, Linda Merelle, Anna Minor, Lindsay Morgan Tracy, Ellen Nolan, Liz Olson, Erik Peterson, Lori Pfungst, Babs Roberts, Teresa Slusher, Anne Stone, Luke Wickham, Cindi Wiek, Christina Wong and Suzy Young.*

**II. Task Force Business**

- **Confirm prior meeting minutes**
  - *Minutes from September 29, 2020 were reviewed, motion to approve by Zeiger, seconded, motion carried, minutes approved.*
- **Taskforce membership**
  - *Thanks and farewell to Rep. Kilduff, Sen. Zeiger, Sen. Walsh for their time, expertise and leadership serving on this taskforce.*
  - *Looking for replacements, we've drafted letters for replacements for the taskforce members that we are losing.*
  - *Sen. Zeiger noted that this group will need a new legislative co-chair, no current volunteers, hoping that we get a new volunteer when we get new recruits in upcoming membership.*
- **Advisory Committee members**
  - *The LGBTQ commission was not in existence when the LEWPRO taskforce and Poverty Reduction Workgroup (LEWPRO Advisory Committee) were created. Including this commission is critical for diverse representation within the poverty-reduction work.*

- *It's within existing ability to add this commission to the Advisory Committee if appointed by secretary of DSHS and with approval of this group, however we would need to seek a change in statute to include them in LEWPRO membership.*
- *Hoping to add them to the advisory committee and seek a discussion to add them to the taskforce membership in the future.*
- *Motion to approve LGBTQ commission in the Advisory Committee – by Sen. Dhingra, and seconded by Rep. Kilduff.*
  - *Rep. Kilduff thanked Babs Roberts and Sen. Dhingra for bringing this forward, saying we want all voices heard in this important work. Asking for support.*
- *Affirming motion to add LBGTQ Commission to the Advisory Committee, all approved, none opposed. Motion carried.*
- *DSHS will work on potential legislative request to add to the membership for LEWPRO.*

### **III. Overview of TANF spending plan**

*Babs Roberts, DSHS/ESA/CSD*

- **Expenditures to date** *(see PowerPoint)*
  - *Part of the taskforce (other than poverty reduction) is continued oversight of the WorkFirst program. The spending plan is broken down into categories including provisos.*
  - *Chart shows the expenditures/disbursements through year so far. Also includes projections for the upcoming year and some variances.*
  - *Overspending in TANF grant category due to overall economy during COVID crisis and some policy changes to address crisis.*
  - *Most other WorkFirst categories are showing some under expenditures. There are some budget reduction options that are potentially there. We planned for a shortfall and for a 15% reduction working under a premise of caution.*
  - *We are on track for spending at this point.*
- **WorkFirst services reductions**
  - *DSHS wrote contracts with each of the WorkFirst partners and made allocation to our regions with less than was approved for this fiscal year to account for caseload and the possibility of budget reductions. We wanted to allow for a full 12 month period of time rather than waiting for new budget and having some harsher cuts over a short amount of time.*
    - *DSHS doesn't know when we will need to reengage WorkFirst clients and will need those services. Assuming some level of underspending this year. Unsure when the policy changes in response to COVID – statewide exemption, time limit extensions and elimination of sanction, will eventually need to be reinstated.*
    - *When this does happen, partners need funding available when we are doing engagement with a larger caseload.*
    - *Sec. Strange thanked the department for doing some early planning, and noted there was also an underspending in staff.*
  - *Discussion:*

- *Rep. Gregerson says that she is concerned the 15% reductions, doesn't want to see those continue without any plans to address them.*
- *Rep. Caldier agree that she doesn't want to see cuts either.*
- *Babs Roberts - we are watching this closely and looking to see if we can look at adding those funds back. We made this decision in June, we were still looking at a 9 billion dollar shortfall, that now looks to be much less so we can look at adding some of those funds back in to support agencies providing services in a virtual environment*
- *Sec. Strange – Will continue to have discussions about budget shortfall, no one wants to look at cuts and we will continue to monitor.*
- *Rep. Gregerson – We know that caseload is growing, instead of looking for cuts perhaps we should be looking into added support higher for the caseload.*
- *Erin Frasier – Noted that there are voluntary WorkFirst participation opportunities even if participation is not mandatory at this time. Wants to make sure that we are communicating to WorkFirst participants so they are aware of these great services that are still available.*
- *Sen. Darneille – Who is using benefits? Impacts of COVID will be widespread. Program utilization by legislative district can help educate when it comes to cuts. Growth in inequities in the rural areas of our state where there is often high program utilization. Requesting is a way to pull that information together - data will be useful during session. We all recognize that COVID is a non-discriminatory disease and will only exacerbate poverty concerns.*
  - *Sec. Strange - 2020 COVID has changed the landscape from long term care to ESA programs having information about usage on districts, regions that can help them make decisions in the upcoming session.*
  - *Sec. Strange - Will check with Mark Eliason on possibility of providing data on utilization of programs again this year.*
    - *Some mental health information might not be there (with the move from DSHS to HCA) but will talk to Sue Birch at HCA. Utilization of mental health and substance abuse is also up.*
- **Incentives for Commerce Community Works participants.**
  - *Community works program is a long term, unpaid, voluntary work experience program. This is structured to offer a co-work activity that counts for federal participation but also build work skills, ethics and experience.*
    - *Option for folks who have been out of the workforce for a while or in collaboration with a school plan or barrier removal activities.*
    - *Its part time program activity and a great way for participants to do a part time activity before transitioning to a full time program. They are typically placed with a nonprofit and we try to align the work with the career goal path.*
    - *Limited number of hours they work based on FLSA counting their food and cash grant.*
  - *Commerce is proposing to offer an incentive to motivate participants to engage in this program so they can get work experience while they are addressing other concerns. Commerce is recommending*

that they offer two store-specific gift cards so it would not count as a payment and would not affect food or cash benefits.

- Commerce hopes to be able to pilot the incentive this year, serving more than 700 participants within existing resources.
- Questions?
  - Tim Probst asked – there is an overall reduction in participation, would this model be able to be used in other programs as well? Cecil Daniels answered - Yes, we will report out on this moving forward so other agencies can potentially pursue.
  - Babs Roberts - Any concerns about moving forward with this pilot?
    - Sec. Strange - heard none, it was legal, all OK, and no problems with the cards.

#### **IV. Child Welfare Coalition and the 5-year plan**

*Staff from the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF); Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children*

*In alignment with Strategy 7 of the 5-year plan: “Decriminalize poverty and reduce reliance on the child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems that exacerbate its intergenerational effect.”*

- **DCYF Strategic Overview** - Nicole Rose - Director of Eligibility and Provider Supports
  - Looking into how do we make sure that the plan is evidence driven?
  - Looking at buckets with prevention, re-orient service contracts, Child Welfare reforms, and new Adolescent-Young Adult Services unit - has a new agency with this focus.
    - Equity - Making sure they went through plan with a racial equity and social justice focus.
    - Intension - reducing out of home placement by half and looking what they need to have in place.
    - Capability - create successful transition into adulthood for youth and young adults in our care.
- **Juvenile Rehabilitation Strategies** - Allison Krutsinger, Deputy Director of Government Affairs and Kathleen Harvey, Director of Community, Reentry and Parole.
  - Goal to create successful transitions into adulthood for youth and young adults in their care.
  - Request legislation to expand therapeutic options in less restricted community settings.
    - Expand and create new options than incarceration, risk assessment tool for juvenile rehabilitation (JR) system to make sure it's working correctly.
      - Currently capacity allows only 50% of those transitioning youth get ongoing support once released.
    - Increase access to needed community transition services
      - Want to expand and grow that using national standards to provide supports for young people. We know that they need to be linked to the workforce, mental health services or therapeutic approaches to be self-sufficient.
    - Ease the bottleneck due to limited capacity of community facilities
      - 25% of youth releasing with no support
    - Decision Package – Less restrictive Environments for young people in JR
      - Looking at least restrictive options and continue to offer supports up to the age of 25.



*are used and there is a very specific guidelines and categories to be eligible for these services and those at imminent risk of entering foster care.*

- *Prevention Pathways*
  - *CPS family assessment response (FAR), CPS family voluntary Services (FVS), additional DCYF program, Community Pathway – hoping that families can receive services in their communities for prevention/early intervention. Aren't quite there yet but taking early steps.*
- *Washington state's candidates for prevention services*
  - *There are a number of state candidates for prevention services to prevent families to coming back on system. Candidates will be phased in for implementation over the multiple years.*
- *Session Priority:*
  - *Another piece of legislation moving forward by looking through kinship or suitable (fictive kin) to look at a child-specific foster care pathway providing more opportunities to pull down federal dollars for foster care funds and making that process easier and provide more culturally available care.*
  - *Updated Secretary's list of disqualifying crimes to keep kids with appropriate caregivers.*
- **Laurie Lippold – Partners for Our Children**
  - *Child Welfare- Exciting time to be doing this work, so much alignment around where we are philosophically and where we want to be going*
    - *They have been doing child welfare work very similarly since early 1900's. We've made some great changes but the core has always been similar.*
      - *The disproportionality numbers that haven't changed much. Other states are having similar conversations looking at this same data.*
      - *Over 50% of black children and their families will have a referral to child welfare by the time the child reaches the age of 18.*
    - *When we look historically at what families need vs what they are provided is a huge gap.*
      - *The TANF grant is much less than the average cost of actually supporting a child.*
      - *The cost of foster care is more and per child, and still less than the costs of putting kids in hotels.*
      - *Hoping that we can continue to adjust funds so workers have the funds and tools to provide the families what they need to support kids.*
  - *Support for Kinship caregivers*
    - *Applaud DCYF, they are making a number of positive steps including expanding services for older youth, revisiting list of disqualifying crimes for relative placement, blind race pilots and engaging with Poverty Reduction Workgroup.*
    - *Providing supports to families involved in the child welfare system so they can access foster care funds is very helpful, however there is still a large number of families that are not involved with the child welfare system.*
    - *Recommends:*

- *Moving from mandatory reporter to mandatory supporters. Can they make these reports to child welfare or are their other options to provide support early.*
- *Moving from a model requiring the relative to provide they are a suitable caregiver to the department burden of proving a relative is not an appropriate caregiver. Would require some liability protections.*
- **Questions or recommendations?**
  - *Sen. Darneille – Has been trying to get orientated with these issues and come with strategies by reading on the topic and realize there is nothing new.*
    - *Need to understand the frailty of the child system and not settle for system that put children at risk for having long term impacts.*
    - *The book Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare by Marian S. Harris, with a foreword by Mark E. Courtney. Author teaches in the School of Social Work & Criminal Justice and the School of Education at the University of WA, both at the Tacoma and Seattle campuses.*
  - *Lori Pfingst wanted to recognize just how far we've come in just a few short years around poverty reduction. This work really started with Laurie Lippold and other advocates in really spearheading this work and leadership that Sen. Zeiger had in this work and be a champion in this work. This amazing collaboration needs to continue.*
  - *Sen. Zeiger mentioned that both Lori and Laurie have been instrumental in this work. Lori has amazing information and bringing the right people in this conversation and thanks to Babs Roberts for all she's done to make this work possible.*
  - *Sen. Darneille wanted to applaud Rep. Kilduff on her work on in this field as well, hoping to loop those heading on to new things and keeping them involved in this work.*

## **V. Food insecurity issues**

*Babs Roberts, DSHS/ESA/CSD and Erin Frasier SBCTC*

- *Work we have done in the last few meetings is to link to the 5-year plan. While food security isn't specifically called out in recommendations but is underlined in a large number for recommendations.*
  - *In 2019 the food insecurity had fallen to the lowest rate since before the last recession due to a number of factors including the economy. However the 2020 food insecurity rate will rise again due to economic impacts from COVID pandemic.*
  - *SNAP application rates is a good measure of food insecurity rates.*
    - *Chart indicates a year after year food application dropping and within first few months of pandemic those applications rates jumped dramatically, leveled out during summer months but have started to grow again in fall.*
    - *Higher applications turn into higher caseloads. This shows more families feeling insecure about their ability to get food.*
  - *There are another of programs that are administered by state agencies; K-12 school free/reduced meal programs, WIC, Emergency food programs.*

- *Saw some waivers to continue services through summer months and WIC also received waivers to distribute food, SNAP and FAP programs received waivers to extend review timelines and making sure households didn't lose access to programs.*
  - *Supplementing food benefits to maximum for household size through federal waiver and pandemic EBT for services to those that lost access to school lunches.*
- *While hunger and food security isn't specifically addressed in recommendations we know poverty and hunger go hand in hand and can be addressed through some of the strategies and recommendations (particularly recommendations 3a-vi, 3a-vii and 5d).*
- *DSHS and SBCTC have been able to collaborate and provide food services:*
  - *Collaboration around the BFET programs and ABAWD services.*
  - *SNAP rules at a federal level says that adult students must also meet a work requirement in order to qualify for food benefits. This has been a barrier for a number of students.*
    - *Working with SBCTC and Washington Achievement Counsel to allow a work-study award to meet the work requirement (even if they haven't started the work-study site yet).*
  - *Additionally, the state board have collaborated to identify a number of education programs that meet the BFET program requirements for vocational programs, qualifying these students for food benefits under federal requirements. Ultimately this means that more students are eligible for food benefits.*
  - *There have been challenges where students can access food benefits with EBT card but can't use them on campus.*
    - *Submitted a waiver to allow college campuses to accept EBT cards and have now submitted a new request to for a demonstration pilot, however both waivers have been denied by USDA.*
    - *Providing technical assistance to colleges to become certified to accept EBT cards (this is ongoing work).*
- **Postsecondary Student Basic Needs - Erin Frasier, SBCTC**
  - *Large portion of students in SBCTC program are in need.*
    - *Many work and about 25% have dependents. They support a large number of students on TANF, SNAP and BFET programs.*
    - *38 colleges participated in Student Hope survey. About 41% of students experience food insecurity.*
      - *Indigenous students saw the highest food insecurity. Also high amount those with life circumstances including those who are parents, former foster care, veterans and homeless.*
    - *They have seen an expansion in on-campus food pantries on all campuses. Food pantries are an indicator, not the solution.*
  - *Student Emergency Assistance Grant is one program to try to address poverty.*
    - *They had 28 out of 34 CTC apply. Were able to fund 16, chosen because they were able to create a low barrier support that could provide services quickly, reduce bias and connect people to resources.*

- *Within 6-7 months they received 2,503 requests and were able to help a number of students. Also connected students that did not receive direct funds to other resources. Only 44 were determined not meeting the emergency. Average request amount was over \$1,300.*
- *Were able to help a number of students by spring quarter and prevented students from dropping out of school. Housing and food insecurities were the highest need but transportation and utilities are also high amounts. Made sure they were looking at a holistic view of needs rather than just issuing a bus pass for example.*
- *Tracked percentage of SEAG recipients by race and ethnicity.*
- *Supporting students Experiencing Homelessness (Senate Bill 5800).*
  - *6 colleges were participated in pilot. They spend a number of months setting up pilot but were still able to serve 100+ students in five months.*
  - *Looked at food security but also providing case management, showers, hygiene, laundry, storage, mailstops, technology and transportation. Every one of the students who participated in this program completed their courses and continued in college for the following quarter.*
- *Daisye Orr mentioned the increased need to address food insecurity specifically around WIC. 12% increase in WIC since receiving a waiver to offer this program remotely. Percentage of the no show rate has decreased (near zero). Better program utilization now that barriers are removed through remote access.*
- *Erin Frasier is moving into a new role but has been a great advocate and team player in helping people access services.*

## **VI. Public Comment**

*Claire Lane (Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition) - For more context on food insecurity in WA: UW researchers surveyed households in 38 of 39 counties this summer: 30% of all respondents reported food insecurity - nearly 60% of those households included children; people of color were more than 1.5 times more likely to be food insecure than white respondents; and, 33% of all respondents were getting some type of food assistance. UW is preparing another round of surveys — this summer's results can be found here:*

*<https://nutr.uw.edu/resource/economic-security-and-food-access-in-washington-state-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>*

*Drayton Jackson (Foundation For Homeless and Poverty Management) - I thank you all for all the work you guys are doing. It is a brave and bold thing to help those underserved and in need.*

## **VII. Closing**

- *Upcoming meetings, proposed dates:*
  - *February 25, 2021*
  - *May 26, 2021*
  - *August 26, 2021*
  - *November 18, 2021*
- *Also, Babs Roberts would like the group provide ideas for agenda building to make sure the meetings are of value to all the members.*

- *Sen. Zeiger said that these started with bills but feels there's a good foundation for work to come. Thanks to everyone who served in this group and Sen. Walsh and Rep. Kilduff as they leave.*