

Minutes (for review and confirmation at next quarterly meeting, May 2019)

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, Luba Bezborodnikova, SBCTC designee (for Erin Frasier), James Harms, Mona Johnson, Diane Klontz, Nam Nguyen, Tim Probst, Maria Siguenza, David Stillman, Cheryl Strange, Sen. Hans Zeiger

Staff attendees:

Carol Albert, Debbie Davis, Sarah Garcia, Susan Kavanaugh, Alison Mendiola Lori Pfingst, Babs Roberts, Suzy Young

II. Task Force Business

Senator Zeiger and Cheryl Strange

Community Services Division Director, Babs Roberts

Economic Services Administration Senior Director, Lori Pfingst

a. Confirm prior meeting minutes

- Zeiger motioned, Maria Siguenza Seconded. Minutes confirmed.

b. February meeting materials review/add to binder

- Meeting materials are on the website:

<https://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/health-care-human-services/workfirst-poverty-reduction-task-force>

c. Updates on pending items from last meeting

- Two pending legislative member positions of the Task Force have been filled by Senator Maureen Walsh and Representative Michelle Caldier

d. Update on Advisory Committee

- Working on adding subject matter expert from West Coast Poverty Center and expert on infant mental health

III. Presentation – ASCEND at the Aspen Institute

Lori Severens and Tiffany Day

- ASCEND's role: Create a platform for convening and highlighting state and local work around critical issues of poverty and equity. Advancing information about generational poverty around the nation. Learning what states are already doing and acting as a hub to share this information. Focusing on the leaders who can change poverty and foster long-term stability for individuals.
- Aspen Institute was created right after WWII. 36 states are part of the Ascend network. Key states that are "ahead" on poverty work include: Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington DC, Maryland, New York.

- *Discussed the importance of cultivating and deploying a 2-generational (2GEN) approach. Plans should be tailored to individual states and include families' voices. Programs should be framed in a way where they do not deter families. It is common sense that parents want their children's lives to be better. This is the natural and powerful motivating force of family. "Parents will do for their kids what they won't do for themselves."*
- *Polling of the American public has found strong public support - across political party, geography, race, ethnicity, gender and age - for whole-family policy approaches, even if these increase taxes.*
- *There is action across the nation to examine poverty. Communication strategies must be created. Don't underestimate the power of convening, creating space, the "magic" happens when the right people are in the room.*
- *Progress can be very organic in nature, but make a point to document as things move forward. 2GEN approaches should be rooted with families at the center and gathering their voice. Using powerful language and stories can prevent folks from avoiding supports that can help them move out of poverty.*
- *Some issues to mitigate include: systems that don't talk to each other (such as data systems regarding adults separated from data systems regarding children), lack of measuring outcomes for both children and families, systemic issues and inequality, historical barriers, siloed funding streams.*
- *To move toward a whole-family approach a theory of change needs to be created. Consider change in short, medium, and long-term process outcomes.*
- *Lessons from other states:*
 - *Georgia:*
 - *Goals set by Governor required "buy-in" from staff on the ground level. Strategies to involve staff such as administering mandatory staff training modules around brain science to foster a better understanding of how trauma influences the brain.*
 - *Aligned early education, health and technical partnerships.*
 - *Used piloting to gather information from families resulting in policy move towards more flexible TANF WorkFirst and childcare program.*
 - *Tennessee:*
 - *Governor supported top-to-bottom agency review to consider: "Are families better off since we've been in their lives?" If not, need to look at systems and policies.*
 - *Heavy investment in staff training and culture change. Staff engagement was very important. Training on Motivational Interviewing, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), etc. Surveyed staff to ask if they felt effective.*
 - *Recognition that living in poverty is a traumatic experience and policies could be contributing to this (such as making applicants "prove" that they are poor.) Reviewed policies that created more stress for families. Utilized public-private partnerships and grants to provide social services in housing developments to increase access and reduce barriers.*
 - *Approached contracting with a 2GEN approach for outcomes.*
 - *Colorado:*
 - *Created a position (2GEN coordinator) to be intentional about aligning and integrating programs for a whole-family approach. Similar to reorganizing as has been done with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).*

- Fostered culture change within agencies to focus on whole-family, strength-based ways of providing services. Doing the same work in a different, better way.
- Put in the work to build strong public-private relationships, notably with philanthropic agencies. Local/community coordination is also important.
- Considered options to help mitigate the “cliff effect” of moving off benefits. County pilot provided opportunity to explore the successes and challenges.
- Presenting child care “deserts” as an emergent public health issue.
- Exploring high school apprenticeship programs that count towards associate degrees.
- Pilot to reengage non-custodial parents through intensive coaching, mental health services, and peer groups. Resulting increase in employment and child support payments.
- Explored Medicaid services that relate to 2GEN (i.e. dyadic screening) and created a checklist promoting use of these services.
- Important to have a champion for anti-poverty and 2GEN work. There has to be leaders outside of the agencies that move the work forward.
- Some challenges noted: communication with families, staff-intensive approaches that are successful can be hard to expand on a larger scale due to insufficient resources.

IV. Discussion

- *What longitudinal data does Washington collect?*
 - *Healthy Youth Survey may be an example.*
 - *The Employment Security Department (ESD) tracks people enrolled in Wagner-Peyser programs and their employment and wage progression. The data is imperfect and not completely inclusive, but is longitudinal. Doesn't indicate poverty status.*
 - *The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Research and Data Analysis Division works with ESD and Department of Commerce to track for participants in various programs. Doesn't look at family size, housing costs and other things that affect poverty measures.*
 - *Department of Commerce measures those that are housed, but does not continue to track to see if they remain housed.*
 - *Unaware of any state that has truly aligned data systems. A couple of states are working towards it.*
- *How does mental health factor in?*
 - *Governor Inslee has created a health subcabinet with the secretaries of DSHS, Department of Health, Health Care Authority, DCYF. Cabinet is looking at universal home visiting, suicide prevention, etc.*
 - *Consider using TANF funds for home visiting. Promoting ACES awareness. Focus on building resiliency for communities.*
- *How can the legislature help?*
 - *Suggestion of providing feedback to legislative members on the success of pilots to create support and increase collaboration.*
 - *Opportunities/workshops for legislators to learn more about the programs as they are partners in the work. Provide education about who uses the programs, information on “cyclers” and sanction policy.*
 - *Specific to Washington, there are several legislators interested in this work but ongoing education for new legislators is needed as others move on. There is a lot of competition for funding various issues. Opportunity exists for more coalition work to build support.*
- *What does this group hope to accomplish in the coming year?*

- Interested in coordination between application processes.
 - Based on comments from the Governor’s Poverty Reduction Workgroup Steering Committee, comprised of 18 people experiencing poverty, the support “system” feels very disjointed and not as though the goal is to help them. Would like to look at ways to make people eligible for many things if, for instance, they are eligible for SNAP (i.e. “one-stop shop”). There may be compliance challenges as all the programs have different rules and laws governing them.
 - The information and referral system (Washington Information Network – WIN 211) can help with coordination, but there may be room for improvement.
- Focus on career progression, living wage opportunities.
- What do you see as Washington’s greatest challenge relative to other states?
 - Database integration (many states struggle with this), there needs to be a plan to accomplish this. Some progress has been made.
 - Increasing awareness/engagement at the line staff level. Some work has been done to increase awareness/exposure and training, but not all staff are at that point yet. Additional investment in tools and training to incorporate strengths-based approach in our regulatory environment is needed. We need to figure out how to do the required documenting and still have a strength-based trauma informed conversation.
- How can we compensate/reimburse individuals who provide expertise as the “client voice?”
 - Interest in compensating clients for the value of their time and expertise. Also, transportation costs. Some states have found options. Generally, Washington statute regarding boards and commissions only allows for expense reimbursement. Commerce has been able to provide stipends from philanthropic funds. This is also the case for the Governor’s Poverty Reduction Workgroup Steering Committee members. Another strategy is to try to hold meetings at convenient times and provide childcare for increased participation. Potential legislative request idea is to allow the ability to compensate client advisors.
- What are the issues at a federal level that ASCEND can advocate around?
 - Making the “cliff effect” into more of a slope, especially when it comes to childcare assistance. High unemployment rate for those with disabilities as Medicaid personal care is such a valuable benefit to potentially lose. Wages have to be very high to compensate for losing such benefits.
 - Closing the gap in student financial aid awards versus what families can actually afford. State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) sees an issue with students maxing out the Pell grant.
 - Eliminating the WorkFirst Participation Rate in favor of measuring outcomes.
 - SNAP policies regarding the able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) population.
 - Changing the focus from program integrity to strength-based services to help people really move out of poverty.
 - Silos and lack of alignment of federal programs/agencies.
 - Educating policy-makers on the impact of trauma and historical trauma, ACES.

V. Public Comment

- Julie Watts, Washington State Budget & Policy Center: Highlighted that this Task Force continues to be responsible for oversight over WorkFirst and wants to bring focus to what is currently happening within the program. Specifically, it used to serve over 35,000 and today serves 15,000. Harsh time limits and sanction polices are driving families off program. Folks need to access the program, if there are plans to transform case management, we need to serve the families that need the help. The current policies are contributing to ACES and toxic stress. Of those cut off, 70% have mental health barriers and 1/3 are homeless when they are terminated due to time limits. 1/3 cut off due to time limits are Black but they are a much smaller percentage of those on TANF. We have to address what is happening by rolling back policies. This group doesn’t have its hands tied by federal

constraints. House Bill 1603 and Senate Bill 5684 would roll back those policies, and the group could make a recommendation to legislature to pass those bills. The racial disproportionality needs to be addressed, caseworker bias and bias within time limits. People of color face more barriers to move out of poverty, so they need more time.

- *Sharon Pesut, Department of Commerce contractor in Clark County: Echoes the previous comment regarding rolling back TANF time-limit policies. Encourages flexibility in the program as not all families fit certain “checkboxes.” Contractors need the time to work on 2GEN efforts, to plant seeds and watch them grow. 27 months of exemption is not necessarily in the best interest of parents. To move out of poverty you need to start with the 20 hours of participation. People are not always ready, there needs to be flexibility for programing and funding. Happy to fight for these changes alongside the Task Force.*

Response, Babs Roberts: We at the Community Services Division are working on a plan for addressing disproportionality, systemic issues, and possible bias. We appreciate and invite thoughts on how further address this issue.