

# *Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI) Council Meeting*



**March 31, 2025  
Meeting Summary**

## **Members in Attendance:**

Commissioner Andrea Barton Reeves, Chair, Department of Social Services (DSS)  
Commissioner Nancy Navarretta, Co-Chair, Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services

Dr. Kari Adamsons, University of Connecticut, Human Development & Family Sciences  
Commissioner Beth Bye, Office of Early Childhood  
Michael Bartley, Department of Labor  
Heriberto (Eddie) Cajigas, Department of Labor (D1 Committee Chair)  
Diana DiTunno, DSS Office of Organizational & Skill Development  
Joseph DiTunno, Judicial Court Support Services Division (D4 Committee Co-Chair)  
Douglas Edwards, Real Dads Forever  
Eulalia Garcia (for DC Sharonda Carlos), Department of Correction  
Anthony Gay, Department of Children and Families (Domain 2 Committee Chair)  
Melvette Hill, CWCSEO (D5 Committee Co-Chair)  
Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly, Dept. of Children and Families  
Anthony (Tony) Judkins, DSS Office of Child Support Services (D5 Committee Chair)  
Aileen Keys, Consultant (D4 Committee Co-Chair)  
Alana Kroeber (for Tanya Barrett), United Way of CT  
Kevin Krusz, Department of Public Health  
Lesley Mara, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities  
Jackson Pierre-Louis, Department of Developmental Services  
Robert Pinnock, Career Resources (Provider Representative, Direct Service Level)  
Lynn Reeves, DSS Office of Child Support Services  
Ariana Trotman, GBAPP (Provider Representative, Program Manager Level)  
Commissioner Ronald Welch, Department of Veterans Affairs  
Jennifer Wilder, Office of Early Childhood  
Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams, Dept. of Children and Families (D3 Committee Chair)  
Patricia Wilson-Pheanious, Consultant  
Chairperson Jennifer Zaccagnini, Board of Pardons and Parole

## **Member Regrets:**

Katie Breslin, Office of Policy Management  
Deputy Commissioner Sharonda Carlos, Department of Correction  
Rose Colon, Great Hartford Legal Aid  
John Frassinelli, State Department of Education  
Scott Gaul, Office of Policy Management  
Steven Hernandez, Esq., ConnCAN (CT Coalition for Achievement Now)  
Nicole Kilduff, Family Strides Inc. (Provider Representative, Executive Level)  
Meghan Scanlon, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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## **Welcome/Introductions**

The Council Co-Chairs opened the meeting and welcomed Members. Members introduced themselves.

## **Review/Acceptance of December Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Navarretta asked members to review minutes from the December 16 meeting. Members reviewed, a motion to accept the minutes was made by Lesley Mara and seconded by Kari Adamsons. Minutes were accepted as written.

## **2025 New England Fathering Conference: Members' Feedback & Reflections**

Commissioner Barton Reeves asked members who attended, or whose staff attended, to share thoughts about the 2025 New England Fathering Conference. Members shared the following:

- It felt very spirited and warm; you left with a good feeling and evidence of the great work being done (Doug Edwards)
- It was well-organized and it shines a bright light on our collaborative here in CT, how advanced our state is in the fatherhood field; as a presenter for the Family Court Roundtable my counterparts were interested in hearing about what we are doing, sharing best practices they could bring back to their leadership, consider implementing and so on (Joe DiTunno)
- You see growth across staff, cross-culture connections and networking; the program dads who attend get to see agencies working together to support them (Pat Wilson Pheanious)
- It was great to see so many different stakeholders present, the cross-representation of fields; the presenters were excellent; the energy was high and contagious (Lesley Mara)
- Great to see an event celebrating fathers, where men and the fathering role is out front and center as focus (Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly)
- As a workshop presenter, I will share that the communication from the planning team was great – very detailed and clear; felt like there were more program dads this year, and the Dads' Stories were wonderful as usual (Melvette Hill)
- The Department of Housing has another event that conflicts with the NEFC every year, so while we are happy to sponsor, we don't always have staff who can attend, including myself; this year our Deputy Commissioner, Julian Pierce and Project Manager Sonia Jelks were able to attend and were so glad they did; they were impressed by all parts of the program and made connections with not just other agency representatives but local program providers and even some fathers looking for housing supports (Steve DiLella)
- The Office of Early Childhood opened up the opportunity to use the sponsor slots to the entire staff agency-wide this year, which allowed other divisions not directly involved with the fatherhood work the opportunity to understand the work better, see how it can be woven into the work they do, and so on; my colleagues were so excited to be there, they loved the energy and the workshops, and found relevance to their work (Jennifer Wilder)
- The aesthetics to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary were great, reaching such a milestone, was very festive; and there was never a drop-off, all parts of the conference were high-quality, lots of energy; and what we do as a collaborative in Ct can hopefully pull other states forward (Anthony Gay)

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## **2025 New England Fathering Conference: Members' Feedback & Reflections**

- The collaboration/networking opportunities throughout the whole event were great; allowed staff to reflect on how we can improve our services to fathers we serve; it was inspiring and myself and my team really appreciated everything offered (Jackson Pierre-Louis)
- Having the opportunity to make connections with Vermont and Maine was wonderful; the Planning Committee does such a great job every year, this year was no different; there was a lot of first-timers too, love to see that (Hon. Michael Ferguson)

Commissioner Barton Reeves agreed with members' comments and stated she is looking forward to next year. Tony shared there were a little over 400 total attendees, of which 193 were from Connecticut. He thanked the sister agencies who provided financial contributions as sponsors this year and DSS's Office of Organizational and Skill Development for providing their media team, David and Mike, for photography and videography services to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They will be producing a highlight video for posting to the NEFC website and we will be sure to let the CFI network know when it's available to view along with event photos. Tony reminded members that Connecticut is hosting again next year, So mark their calendars now to save the dates for the 2026 NEFC, which are March 18-20, 2026.

## **Strategic Plan: Implementation Update** **Domain Committee Chair Reports**

### **DOMAIN 1: Fathers economically stable**

D1 Chair Eddie Cajigas reported that the Committee remains on hiatus. He asked members if there were any items for which they believe would be appropriate for the Committee's charge. Diana suggested the quick-access resource guide the group developed a couple years ago be reviewed, to confirm information remains accurate and links work, etc. Because there has been staff turnover at many of the fatherhood programs, once the review is complete the guide could be shared with the network again, as it was found to be a useful tool for providers in the past. Eddie agreed and will contact Diana and Mike Bartley to schedule a meeting. Eddie stated if Council members have other items they would like the group to work on, please email him and Diana.

### **DOMAIN 2:**

#### **Fathers in healthy relationships with their children, co-parents, significant others**

Committee Chair Anthony Gay reported that the Committee has experienced some transitions with members stepping down and others joining, so they are rebuilding to continue their efforts to identify potential ways to enhance or improve the child welfare system. The results of the survey that had been re-disseminated to DCF Adolescent Unit social workers are currently being analyzed and he hopes to be able to share information at the June meeting. He stated the group also has been thinking about strategies for increasing the number of males in the field, opportunities for males of color in particular.

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## **Strategic Plan: Implementation Update** **Domain Committee Chair Reports**

### **DOMAIN 2:**

#### **Fathers in healthy relationships with their children, co-parents, significant others**

Lesley Mara noted the partnerships that CT State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) has with high schools, early college credit programs etc. as their regular course of business and they are happy to work with D2 Committee on this.

Commissioner Barton Reeves stated that there are professionals close to retirement that want to pivot to work in a different field and could be a cohort to look at to support this strategy.

Commissioner Navarretta stated there are also student loan repayment programs that could be examined to see if DCF could implement to recruit/hire males/males of color for the field.

### **DOMAIN 3: Young people prepared to be responsible parents**

Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams reported that he reported in December that individual meetings have been held with the UConn Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence, GBAPP, Inc., Department of Public Health, and CT State Colleges and Universities an. He expressed that those conversations were very positive and some great ideas have been shared as we seek to increase supports for young males as fathers or fathers-to-be, even for those who aren't yet in the role but interventions that may support them to be prepared for when they do become parents as adults.

In January, a meeting was held with the State Department of Education. They spoke about gaps in the high schools (grades 9-12) in all public-school districts, the questions "are you a parent" is not asked. The SDE is committed to interject the need for this across the system, as it is connected to issues of truancy, dropping out, general absence and graduation rates.

DC Williams also reported during the session, Representative Anthony Nolan from New London asked to learn more about the CFI, so he coordinated a meeting with DSS, himself and Rep. Nolan to introduce him to our statewide collaborative, our systems change efforts and how we connect to community-based programs working with fathers. During that meeting, Rep. Nolan expressed interest in continuing more discussion about how the CFI can be supported by the legislature and in touring the fatherhood program in his district to gain an understanding of the programming arm of the work.

### **DOMAIN 4:**

#### **Men involved in the criminal justice system supported in being responsible fathers**

Committee Co-Chair Joe DiTunno reported the web-based training (WBT) session for CSSD staff (Adult Probation, Juvenile Probation, Bail Services and Family Services Divisions), of which the Council saw a brief demo at the December meeting, has been edited for content and is now with the CSSD training team for final phase of development.

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## **Strategic Plan: Implementation Update Domain Committee Chair Reports**

### **DOMAIN 4:**

#### **Men involved in the criminal justice system supported in being responsible fathers**

CSSD staff will beta-test the WBT to ensure it resonates with staff. They will pilot the training with training academy staff and those from each of the CSSD divisions for feedback and once this input is incorporated into the curriculum the training will be offered to all staff at CSSD. As this part of the Committee’s work comes to fruition, the Co-Chairs will be meeting to re-set goals and priorities and discuss membership needs, as they have also had members step down.

### **DOMAIN 5: Public Policy and Awareness**

Tony Judkins, Committee Chair, was pleased to report that he and Melvette met to discuss her joining as the D5 Co-Chair, and she agreed. He stated that beyond continuing the development and dissemination of the biannual CFI newsletter, with the next issue being the Spring/Summer 2025 issue planned for May 2025, their group will also begin a “reset” and set priorities for the year ahead at their next meeting.

### **211CT Workgroup Chair Report**

Alana Kroeber provided the report on behalf of Chair Tanya Barrett. The 211Ct Workgroup is kicking back into gear with review and editing of the e-library papers. Further, United Way of Ct and DSS are coordinating training for fatherhood program providers in May. 211CT is also launching an AI-powered chatbot for the website to aid those searching for services. This new tool should be launched in a couple of weeks.

### **Fatherhood Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

Diana projected the final draft of the interagency Fatherhood Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and informed members a paper copy is also provided in their meeting folders. She asked members if they had additional suggestions for revisions to the common bullets. Members agreed no further changes were necessary. She noted Tony has received suggested revisions from the various liaisons with regard to their respective scopes of services, and minor changes approved by Department of Correction and Department of Veterans Affairs for their respective agency’s sections. Tony informed members the MOU will be forwarded to DSS contracts unit staff for finalizing and will be sent for agency leaders’ signatures accordingly.

Tony mentioned the joint report (Section 1.4) and Diana projected the draft template for members to review and approve. Members also provided a paper copy in their meeting folders. Members approved the template. It is attached at the end of these minutes and will also be emailed to parties to the agreement (agency heads and identified liaisons).

Tony reminded members that MOU parties will submit to DSS by September 30; an email reminder will be sent to all parties at 30 days and again at 15 days from the annual deadline.

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## **Provider Coalition Report**

Program recruitment and enrollment continues. DSS-certified fatherhood program staff and many fathers enrolled in their programs attended the New England Fathering Conference. This took much coordination but they expressed gratitude to DSS for providing funds to allow both staff and program dads the opportunity to participate. Both staff and the fathers found the speakers, roundtable sessions and workshops very engaging, relevant and informative.

## **2025 CFI Dear Dad Tour (DDT)**

Tony shared the 2026 CFI DDT will kick off the Monday after Mother's Day and run until the day before Father's Day, which means May 12 through June 14, 2026. The Tour will make 4 stops, and the team at American View Productions is currently working to confirm locations. Given this identified date range, options identified thus far include:

- **Fairfield County Foodie Fest**  
Saturday, May 17; 11:00am to 7:00pm; Trumbull Mall
- **Naugatuck Duck Day Festival**  
Sunday, June 1; 11:00am to 4:00pm; downtown Naugatuck
- **Hartford Taste**  
Saturday, June 7; 12:00pm to 9:00pm; Pratt and Trumbull, downtown
- **Danbury Street Festival**  
Saturday, June 14 from 12:00pm to 6:00pm, Main Street Danbury

Tony stated he would inform the network as locations are confirmed. He asked members to consider attend the CFI DDT stops and serve as "CFI ambassadors". He explained, Council members and others in the CFI network would be present at the booth throughout the event to talk with festival-goers about who the CFI is, what the collaborative does, etc. The AVP video techs will be getting folks excited about sharing stories, being recorded, running the video, and so on...but they are not "subject matter experts" on the CFI. Therefore, having Council members, Domain Committee members, fatherhood program staff and program dads there to talk with people helps spread the word and raise awareness of the CFI, which is our overarching goal for the campaign.

Tony reported DSS purchased some CFI polo shirts for those members who sign up to attend and serve in the ambassador role, a "uniform" of sorts to support CFI branding efforts. And in addition to the CFI flyers and 211CT flyers and contact cards, which we count so we know exactly how many were disseminated at each Tour stop, we have some giveaways for the table too – coloring kits for kids with our logo, stress balls, pens, etc. He stated there isn't a set limit or schedule for CFI ambassadors at any given Tour stop. We are just hoping some Council members, and Committee members, are able/willing to sign up and attend – even if only for a couple of hours. Tony reiterated he will be encouraging the staff from DSS-certified and other local fatherhood programs to attend, and have their program dads come too, with or without their families – they could record their stories, talk to Council members and festival-goers about how the programs have helped them. It wouldn't be required, but it would be great to have them be

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able to answer people's questions about services provided etc. as they are the direct service arm of the CFI. At the DDT stops, festival-goers who stop by the booth can also provide their email address to be added to the CFI email listserv.

Tony asked Council members to email him to confirm for which of the above Tour stops they are interested in serving as a CFI ambassador, and also provide their shirt size so he can coordinate getting a shirt to them in advance of the Tour stop they will attend.

### **Other Business**

Commissioner Barton Reeves shared CFI Council quarterly meetings are confirmed through December 2025. The dates are June 30; September 29; December 15 and all run the same timeframe of 1:30-3:30pm here at DSS Central Office. If any members have not received the Outlook invites please email Commissioner Barton Reeves' assistant Candace Madison and cc Diana DiTunno and we will be sure to confirm all Members receive the invitation.

### **Membership List: March 2025**

A revised Membership list was provided and can be found at the end of these minutes.

*Meeting Adjourned.*



## ANNUAL REPORT January – December 2025

Presented to the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative Council

### SECTION 1: DESCRIPTION

This joint annual report is a requirement under the *Interagency Fatherhood Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU), between the Department Of Social Services and the Departments of Children And Families, Correction, Developmental Services, Education, Housing, Labor, Mental Health And Addiction Services, Public Health and Veterans Affairs, the Board Of Pardons And Paroles; Office of Early Childhood; Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division and Support Enforcement Services; and the Connecticut State Colleges And Universities.

Information in this report includes father-serving programs and/or activities as outlined under the MOU Section 2.3, Description of Services, inclusive of the common bullets for all parties and those bullets that are agency-specific, and submitted to the Department of Social Services by each of the parties' identified liaisons:

**DSS**

Anthony Judkins  
Program Manager  
Office of Child Support Services

**DCF**

Michael Williams  
Deputy Commissioner

**DOC**

Elisha Chornoby  
Director of Reentry Services

**DDS**

Jackson Pierre-Louis  
Division Director  
Legal & Government Affairs

**Department of Housing**

Steve DiLella  
Director, Individual and Family  
Support Program Unit

**DOL**

Michael Bartley  
Welfare to Work Manager

**DMHAS**

Sarju Shah, Director  
Prevention & Health Promotion  
Division

**DPH**

Kevin Krusz, Contracts Manager  
Diabetes and Heart Disease

**DVA**

John Carragher  
Director of Advocacy and  
Assistance

**OEC**

Jennifer Wilder  
Primary Prevention Services  
Coordinator

**SDE**

John D. Frassinelli, Bureau Chief  
Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family  
Services and Adult Education

**BOPP**

Jennifer Medina Zaccagnini  
Chairperson

**Judicial SES**

Paul Bourdoulous, Director

**Judicial CSSD**

Joseph DiTunno, Director  
Family Services Division

**SCU**

Lesley Mara  
Director of Sponsored Programs

**Annual Report on CFI Activities  
January – December 2025**

**AGENCY NAME:**

**SECTION 2: ACTIVITIES FOR ALL PARTIES (as listed MOU Section 2.3)**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>AGENCY RESPONSE FOR REPORT PERIOD</b>
Provide membership and active participation on the Fatherhood Advisory Council and related events/activities	
As applicable, report out at Council meetings on the progress of the Department/agency/institution regarding activities outlined in this agreement	
Designate a department/agency/institution liaison to facilitate communication and reporting about fatherhood activities	
Seek opportunities for collaboration among partners for programs, projects, or legislative proposals that support positive father, child and/or family outcomes	
Seek opportunities for funding, consistent with the agency's mission, to support positive father involvement	

**Annual Report on CFI Activities  
January – December 2025**

**AGENCY NAME:**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>AGENCY RESPONSE FOR REPORT PERIOD</b>
Provide a link to the CT Fatherhood Initiative (CFI) website ( <a href="http://www.ct.gov/fatherhood">www.ct.gov/fatherhood</a> ) from the Department/agency/institution website;	
Support the Annual New England Fathering Conference via attendance, training and/or financial support if funding is available;	
Recognize father engagement efforts within our agency and collaborative efforts with partners are under the umbrella of the CFI and acknowledge the CFI when sharing these efforts with state and federal representatives, the media, community partners and the general public;	
Provide active participation for the implementation of the CFI Strategic Plan, including staff leadership/membership on Committees and Workgroups and related activities;	

**Annual Report on CFI Activities  
January – December 2025**

**AGENCY NAME:**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>AGENCY RESPONSE FOR REPORT PERIOD</b>
<p>Support responsible data development by identifying ways to collect data on men who are fathers, and opportunities to share data across agencies to obtain more accurate metrics on fathers involved with state systems that would promote/support understanding, services and collaboration while not imposing undue harm to fathers or their children;</p>	
<p>Strengthen our commitment as CFI partners by communicating CFI efforts throughout the agency and with our partners;</p>	
<p>Commit to promote racial justice, with policies, beliefs, practices, attitudes, and actions that foster equal opportunity and treatment for people of all races;</p>	
<p>Offer staff training/presentations as appropriate to in-state and out-of-state partners/networks about the CFI, including the high-level introductory slides and supplementary materials approved by the CFI Council in September 2024, and the importance of father involvement to improve child and family outcomes.</p>	

**Annual Report on CFI Activities  
January – December 2025**

**AGENCY NAME:**

**SECTION 3: AGENCY-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES (as listed MOU Section 2.3)**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>AGENCY RESPONSE FOR REPORT PERIOD</b>

**Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative Council Membership  
March 2025**

<b>MEMBER NAME</b>	<b>AGENCY</b>
Commissioner Andrea Barton Reeves (Council Chair)	Department of Social Services
Commissioner Nancy Navarretta (Council Co-Chair)	Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Dr. Kari Adamsons	UConn Human Development & Family Sciences
Tanya Barrett (CFI-211 Workgroup Chair)	United Way of CT
Michael Bartley	Department of Labor
Paul Bourdoulous	Judicial Branch Support Enforcement Services
Commissioner Beth Bye (Jennifer Wilder)	Office of Early Childhood
Heriberto (Eddie) Cajigas (Domain 1 Committee Chair)	Department of Labor
Deputy Commissioner Sharonda Carlos	Department of Correction
Rose Colon	Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Steve DiLella	Department of Housing
Joseph DiTunno (Domain 4 Committee Co-Chair)	Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division
Douglas Edwards	Real Dads Forever
Hon. Michael Ferguson	Judicial Branch Family Support Magistrate Division
John Frassinelli	State Department of Education
Anthony Gay (Domain 2 Committee Chair)	Department of Children and Families (DCF)
Dr. Derrick Gordon	The Consultation Center at Yale University
Steven Hernández, Esq.	ConnCAN (The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now)
Melvette Hill	Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
Anthony Judkins (Domain 5 Committee Chair)	Department of Social Services, Office of Child Support Services
Aileen Keays (Domain 4 Committee Co-Chair)	Consultant
Nicole Kilduff (Provider Coalition Rep: Executive level)	Family Strides, Inc.
Kevin Krusz	Department of Public Health
Lesley Mara	CT State Colleges and Universities
Jackson Pierre-Louis	Department of Developmental Services
Robert Pinnock (Provider Coalition Rep: Direct Svc level)	Career Resources, Inc.
Wizdom Powell, PhD	UHC Health Disparities Institute
Lynn Reeves	Department of Social Services, Office of Child Support Services
Meghan Scanlon	CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Ariana Trotman (Provider Coalition Rep: Prog Manager level)	GBAPP, Inc.
Commissioner Ronald Welch	Department of Veterans Affairs
Deputy Commissioner Michael Williams	Dept. of Children and Families
Former Rep. Patricia Wilson Pheanious	Consultant
Chairperson Jennifer Zaccagnini	Board of Pardons and Paroles