

Questions for the Nominee for Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families

By: John D. Moran, Principal Analyst
March 25, 2026 | 2026-R-0058

Commissioner of Children and Families ([CGS §§ 17A-5 & -6](#))

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) commissioner is responsible for establishing facilities and services for children under the department's care and their families. These include child protective, foster care, and family services; substance abuse and related services; mental health services; and prevention and educational services. DCF is the state's lead child welfare agency.

Questions

1. Your work experience offers a unique perspective on the agency, having served DCF as a social worker, a supervisor, the commissioner (2007-2011), and you came back to the agency as general counsel, and interim commissioner. How do you think your perspective of the agency from these various roles would benefit your tenure if you are confirmed as commissioner a second time?
2. The agency has come under public scrutiny considering several recent high-profile cases, what immediate steps is the agency taking to address these concerns?
3. Decisions to reunify a family or have a child remain with another caregiver are very difficult ones. In the case of Mimi Torres-Garcia, she was with her paternal grandmother until she was nine when she was reunited with her mother, Karla Garcia, according to [news accounts](#). As many people are aware, Mimi later died of malnutrition when she was 11 and her mother is facing multiple charges, including murder. Have you examined the department's reunification decision to see what mistakes were made? What changes, if any, should be made to the department's protocols or policies?

4. Staying with this case, it is now known that the mother (Karla Garcia) had another child pose as Mimi during a DCF video wellness check which occurred when Mimi was no longer alive. Apparently, video wellness checks are not normally allowed, but in this case an exception was made because Mimi's mother said she was out of state. What has DCF learned from this mistake and have there been changes made to prevent it from happening again?
5. When there is a crisis or a tragedy in the headlines it is understandable that DCF cannot always discuss details publicly because (a) the agency needs to protect confidential information or (b) there is possible legal action against the agency. However, the agency must be able to publicly address its failings as well as its successes to assure lawmakers and the public that it is fulfilling its statutory duty to protect children. What can you tell us today to assure this committee and the public that DCF can fulfill this obligation?
6. What is the current DCF policy when a caseworker is repeatedly attempting in-person meetings with a child for a wellness check or an investigation, but the parent or guardian keeps providing excuses over a period of months about why the child is not available? At what point does DCF become more suspicious and take more significant action to locate and see the child in person?
7. The department has shifted its preference to kin placements, rather than placements in core (non-kin) foster homes. How does casework for kin placements differ from that for placements in core foster homes? Is it more or less time-consuming and intensive for DCF staff? What staffing changes has the department made in response to this shift (e.g., the number of staff supervising these placements or their training requirements)?
8. The 2025 Child and Family Services Review [final report](#) from the U.S. Administration for Children & Families found that Connecticut is (a) not meeting the outcome measurements of well-being for kids in foster care and (b) in basic conformity with only two of the seven factors the federal government reviewed. While acknowledging some areas in which the state performs well, such as placing siblings together and placing children with kin, the report concluded that Connecticut should be put on a performance improvement plan (PIP) until it makes progress on these markers of well-being. You previously commented that the department was developing this PIP. Is it currently in place and, if so, (a) what are the priority issues, (b) what specific progress has been made, and (c) how will we know if the PIP is successful?
9. The executive director of the Center for Children's Advocacy has suggested that much of this underperformance is tied to a lack of department resources. Do you think that is the case and is the agency seeking an increased appropriation this year to meet these challenges? If so, which areas of need are most impacted by a lack of resources and how would you prioritize using increased resources?
10. DCF has noted that the agency loses a high percentage of social workers who leave for other employment within two years of being hired. What can the department do to decrease this turnover?
11. The Auditors of Public Accounts recently completed a [performance audit](#) of the effectiveness of DCF's policies and procedures for reporting, locating, and monitoring children missing

from care. (“Missing from care” is a broad category that includes (a) runaways who may be unaccounted for over long periods and (b) children who are not at their foster care home or other appropriate location but may only be unaccounted for briefly, such as getting home from school two hours late.) The audit found, among other things, that DCF did not perform formal assessments of common risk factors or develop plans to address children who go missing from care to determine steps to reduce these instances. Can you tell us what progress the department has made in this area?

12. In March 2022, a federal judge terminated the Juan F. consent decree, ending more than 30 years of federal court oversight of DCF (Governor Lamont’s March 24, 2022 [press release](#)). During the consent decree, the agency had to follow certain guidelines (e.g., limiting caseloads and reporting statistics) and work toward certain metrics. Do you think that reinstating any of the Juan F. requirements would improve agency operations?
13. Based on the data available on DCF’s [Data & Dashboards page](#), which is current through 2024, and more recent reporting from the [Hartford Courant](#), the number of children in foster care has been drastically reduced (from approximately 4,200 in 2020 to approximately 2,900 at the end of 2025), a trend that began prior to the end of the consent decree and shortly after a leadership change in 2019. What do you think drove this reduction? Was it a reduction in the number of children being abused and neglected in the state? And has the average caseload per worker been proportionately reduced?
14. The department has frequently referenced a lack of licensed foster homes as one of the biggest challenges in placing children. The department has made many efforts over the years to recruit, license, and retain foster families. Roughly how many core foster homes does Connecticut currently have? Do you see a trend in this number year over year and, if so, what factors do you think might be driving that trend?

JM:ms