

# DHS News Flash

## DHS Welcomes New Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose

Most people would be daunted by the prospect of running one of Philadelphia's largest and perhaps most scrutinized agencies, but DHS' new Commissioner, Anne Marie Ambrose, can't wait to get started. Ambrose, who most recently served as Director of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Services at the Pennsylvania Department of public Welfare, has a long list of goals she wants to accomplish, but her first priority is to walk the halls and meet as many staff members as possible.

"While I know I won't get to everyone right away, I want to invite as many opportunities as possible for staff to communicate their concerns and suggestions as well as their hopes and dreams for the Department," she says.

Many DHS staff members are already well acquainted with the new Commissioner and know her as a competent and effective leader. From 2001-2005, she served as DHS Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Justice Services where she was instrumental in the creation of Philadelphia's reintegration project--a nationally recognized model for aftercare services for delinquent youth. She was also a tireless advocate for gender-specific services for girls entering the system and worked hard to reduce chronic overcrowding at the Youth Study Center.

Ambrose's familiarity with the Department will be an asset, as she will need to hit the ground running. Demanding her immediate attention are the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), scheduled for July 28<sup>th</sup>

through August 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the Needs Based Plan and Budget, which is due August 15<sup>th</sup>. She has already set up weekly CFSR meetings with staff who are working diligently to ensure the Department is prepared for the intensive Federal review and plans to work closely with staff to develop a budget that is a credible reflection of the Department's anticipated need. She also intends to invite the Court into discussions about both the budget and the CFSR, noting that their input will be critical to the Department's success.

"I am looking forward to meeting with Judge Dougherty and maintaining a strong relationship with the Court," she says explaining that an effective partnership between DHS and the Court is in the best interest of the children and families the Department serves.

Ambrose is also eager to move forward on the reform effort and the recommendations of the Community Oversight Board (COB). She praised Acting Commissioner Evans for his work on DHS' existing Action Plan. While she views the plan as an excellent blue print with which to begin her tenure, she says that some of the timelines are likely to change. "I want to prioritize tasks so that we are poised to implement and monitor initiatives successfully. If we take something on, I want to be sure we can do it right."

Among the keys to that success, she believes, are the Department's data capabilities and overall quality assurance efforts as well as staff training. "DHS needs to have access to more accurate and timely data so we can better assess our efforts, identify problems



and recognize and celebrate what we are doing well. Everything we do should be outcome driven so that we can be confident that the Department is making the best investment of its resources on behalf of children and families.” She also stresses the importance of enhancing staff training. “Anytime we ask staff to do something new, it is imperative that we make sure they are adequately prepared.”

With an extensive background in juvenile justice, the new Commissioner is also anxious to work with staff at JJS. As a lawyer who spent 13 years working as a public defender in juvenile court before being named Deputy Commissioner of JJS, she has a keen understanding of the issues facing youth in the system and is well aware of the problems created by overcrowding at the Youth Study Center. She is zealous about developing a state-of-the-art juvenile justice facility and wants to

ensure a smooth move to the interim YSC location and work closely with staff in planning for the permanent site.

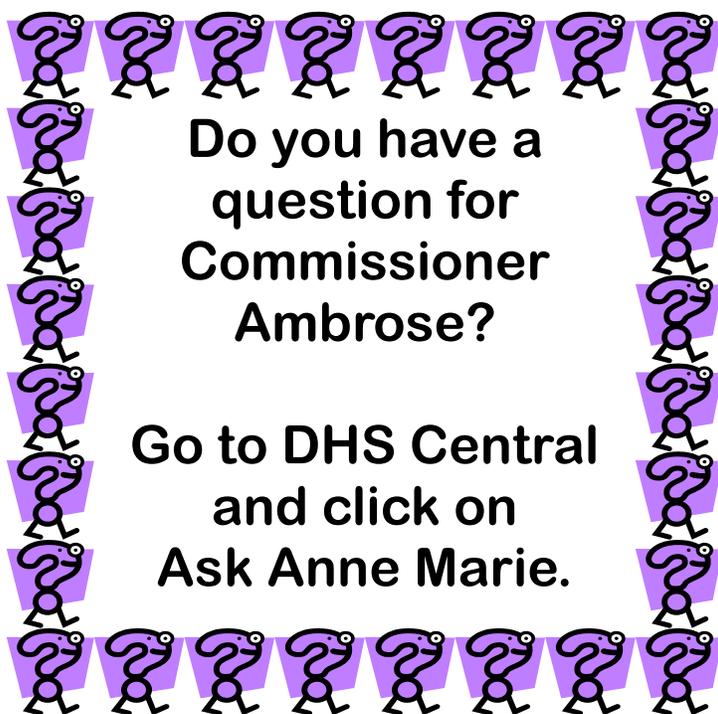
Finally, Ambrose is commit-

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ted to boosting staff morale. “I want to reconnect staff to why they are here and let them know how much they are needed and appreciated. The Department has a tremendously dedicated staff who are devoted to the children and families they serve. I am extremely positive about the potential of

this agency and I hope that my positive attitude is contagious. I think it is essential that we celebrate all the good work that happens here and make sure staff, stakeholders and the public are hearing those positive stories on a regular basis.”

Ambrose, who became a lawyer to be a voice for those who are not traditionally heard, says her approach to child welfare is grounded in a strength-based philosophy. In all of her positions, she has always been motivated by a desire to strengthen families so they can move to independence and become successful citizens. “It has been a journey,” she says, “but along the way, I’ve tried to use every opportunity I’ve had to make meaningful change in the system.” She looks forward to the many opportunities--not only to shape policy, but to serve the children and families of Philadelphia--that her new position will bring.



**Do you have a question for Commissioner Ambrose?**

**Go to DHS Central and click on Ask Anne Marie.**

**Do you work with somebody who embodies the spirit of one of DHS' new Core Values?**

We want to recognize staff who personify each of the new Core Values.

**This month's Core Value is: *Respect***

***We value each other, families, children and community partners. We provide culturally sensitive services and treat families with dignity and compassion.***

To nominate a colleague, send an email with your name, the name of the colleague you are nominating and a narrative that describes how this person embodies *Respect* to [dhscommunications@phila.gov](mailto:dhscommunications@phila.gov).

**The deadline is July 9, 2008.**

Submissions will be posted on DHS Central and entered in a random prize drawing.