

DHS News Flash

DHS Welcomes New Senior Staff

Susan Kinnevy
Deputy Commissioner, Division of Performance Management and Accountability



Susan C. Kinnevy, Ph.D., MSW has been appointed Deputy Commissioner, Division of Performance Management and Accountability. Kinnevy, who most recently served as Co-Director, Center for Research on Youth and Social Policy (CRYSP) at the School of Social Policy and Practice, University of Pennsylvania, has a broad base of experience in evaluating child-serving systems. Her appointment, and the newly created Division that she leads, exemplifies Commissioner Anne Marie

(See Susan Kinnevy on page 4)

Mark Maher
Deputy Commissioner, Administration and Management



Mark Maher has been appointed Deputy Commissioner Administration and Management (A&M), which is the support area for DHS' three operating divisions: Children and Youth, Prevention and Juvenile Justice. The division includes contracts, fiscal, administrative services, procurement, personnel and information and technology (IT). Maher, who most recently served as DHS Chief of Staff, brings a broad base of experience to his new role.

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Deszeree Thomas
Special Assistant to the Commissioner



Deszeree Thomas has been appointed Special Assistant to the Commissioner. Thomas has worked with DHS in various capacities for more than 10 years including seven years as a lawyer for the Department. In that role, she gained a thorough understanding of both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. During the last four years, she has served as an internal consultant to support the Department's functions in provider relations, program evaluations and resource development. She was valuable in evaluating programs and providing technical assistance to agencies serving girls--an area that is her passion.

(see Thomas on page 2)

Timene Farlow
Deputy Commissioner, Juvenile Justice Services



Timene Farlow has been appointed Deputy Commissioner, Juvenile Justice Services. Farlow, who began her career with DHS in 1995, has a strong background in the Juvenile Justice Division where she has held a variety of positions including Social Work Supervisor of the Youth Study Center (YSC), Director of Professional Services and Director of Court and Community Services. Most recently, she served as Director of Provider Relations and Evaluation of Programs (PREP).

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Farlow says one of her primary goals in her new position is fully integrating JJS into the larger Department. "For many years, JJS has been thought of as kind of an outlier," she says. "The mission of DHS is to ensure the safety and well being of at-risk children and youth. It is important that staff, stakeholders and the public understand that JJS is working toward that goal in concert with the rest of the Department."

According to Farlow, one of the biggest challenges facing JJS is reducing reliance on residential placements for delinquent youth. "During the past four years, there has been a 20% increase in these placements, which not only has significant fiscal implications for the Department, but more importantly has meant that children are not always given the greatest chances for success," she says.

"Studies have demonstrated that much better outcomes are achieved when youth are treated and

supervised in their own home communities," Farlow explains. "We are working closely with stakeholders in our Court and Community Services Planning Group to develop a broader array of community based services for delinquent youth that judges can feel confident about using. Our goal is to build the capacity of programs that provide the specialized services these youth so often need while ensuring the public's safety by providing the supervision and oversight that prevent young people from getting into further trouble."

Certainly there are times when placement is necessary and in these instances JJS has worked hard to ensure youth remain in Pennsylvania. In the last four years, the Division has reduced the number of out-of-state placements by 60 percent. In addition, the Department will soon be closing placements at three more out-of-state facilities.

Farlow is particularly excited about the groundbreaking of the YSC

which occurred on April 21st. The new state-of-the-art facility will have the capacity to serve 150 youth and will provide increased security. It will also offer enhanced services including a state-of-the-art school, complete with a computer lab and library, which will improve the Schools District's ability to ensure that YSC students receive an education comparable to their peers out in the community. Moreover, the Center has been awarded a grant from PCCY's Picasso Project, which will enable YSC students to work with *Taller Puertoriqueno* and *Young Playwrights* to produce creative works of art.

With a new Youth Study Center in the works and collaborative efforts underway with the courts and other stakeholders, Farlow is hopeful about the future of JJS. "I feel extremely lucky to be working with a Commissioner who previously held this position because she has a profound understanding of the issues and a true commitment to the youth we serve."

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As a consultant, she improved her knowledge of how operations, policy and procedures, contracts, and provider issues are managed.

Thomas' wide range of experience throughout the Department was the ideal preparation for her new role, where she assists the Commissioner in overseeing the agency's day-to-day operations. "My primary goal is to support the Commissioner in implementing her vision and the Department's strategic plan." To achieve that goal, she works closely with the Deputy Commissioners and Legal Department to ensure that projects move forward efficiently and that important issues are communicated to the Commissioner. Currently, she is working with executive staff to prepare budget testimony.

Thomas also serves as liaison to the Community Oversight Board (COB) for which she manages internal coordination to help ensure the agency is on track to implement the Board's recommendations and prepares the Commissioner for presentations. She also supports the Commissioner's Action Response Office (CARO) in carrying out its functions.

Along with providing assistance to these entities, Thomas is also involved in several special projects including helping the Department improve outcomes for youth. She has participated in a number of peer-to-peer consultations with different jurisdictions and will soon be going to Utah to learn how that state's performance management process functions.

According to Thomas, the biggest challenge of her new position is prioritizing. "There are so many projects and requests and all of them are important," she says. She manages by being extremely organized and detail oriented and delegating when possible.

In addition to her many responsibilities on the job, Thomas, who has her Juris Doctor and Master of Business Administration degrees, is completing her Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development. She intends to use her skills to improve programming and outcomes for girls. While her life is certainly busy, she is enjoying her new role. "I love the challenge of reform and believe that this position allows me to utilize all of my skills to support the Commissioner in carrying out her vision."

(Mark Maher, continued from page 1)

In addition to his extensive experience in the child welfare system where he held positions as a social worker, program analyst and executive assistant to the Deputy Commissioner of Juvenile Justice, he has also served as the City's Deputy Budget Director and Director of Budget and Public Policy for Safe and Sound.

He'll need to draw on that range of experience as he navigates the administrative capacity of an agency with over 1800 employees and numerous complex funding streams. "DHS is a large and multi-faceted agency," he says. "My primary goal is to ensure that the divisions that work with children, youth and families have the resources to do their jobs. Of course, it goes without saying that we have to be fiscally responsible and never has that been more important than now."

Despite the obstacles posed by the economic downturn, Maher feels confident in his new role. "I'm up to the challenge and I can say that because I have a great staff. The senior staff here is experienced and knowledgeable and even more important, willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done."

Among the challenges he faces are a host of new Federal and State mandates that impact DHS funding. One important function of his position is to understand the implications of these mandates on the Department's budget. Some of the changes, like Title IV-E can have a direct impact on revenue, while others like Fostering Connections, will have an indirect impact on how much the Department spends."

Reflecting on the enormous loss felt throughout the agency by the death of John Zanier, Maher notes that managing the fiscal aspects of the job will be particularly challenging. "John was the best county fiscal officer in the state. He had such a vast wealth of knowledge and skill as well as a unique and thorough understanding of the DHS budget, which is unlike any other."

In addition to protecting the fiscal health of the organization, Maher's division is also responsible for information technology. Thus, another important goal is to ensure the agency has state-of-the-art, highly functioning information systems that enable social workers to collect and maintain data in a timely and accurate fashion. Maher

says he believes that the implementation of FACTS2 is a positive step, but notes that in an environment in which technology changes rapidly, DHS needs to remain open and flexible.

Additionally, because highly skilled staff are critical to DHS' performance, Maher is also exploring how to better meet the agency's need for individuals with advanced

technical skills, particularly in the area of financial analysis. To this end, he will work with DHS and City HR staff to explore new ideas for recruiting and hiring individuals who have the necessary knowledge and experience.

At the same time, Maher aims to improve the way the agency interacts with providers. Among his objectives is to streamline the contracting process to eliminate the sometimes lengthy delays that occur when contracts are conformed. He also wants to communicate proactively

with providers and vendors both about the status of contracts, so they can respond and plan accordingly, and about the importance of submitting required documentation in a timely fashion, which can shorten the time it takes both to execute contracts and pay invoices.

While he admits there is a lot to accomplish, Maher is optimistic about the progress he has seen since rejoining DHS and looks forward to helping provide the supports the agency needs to function at its best.

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How can DHS do things better for LGBTQ Youth?

At The DHS Town Hall Meeting For LGBTQ Youth , they have a chance to talk to DHS leadership about how DHS can improve services for LGBTQ youth. Youth that are currently receiving services from DHS or have been involved with DHS in the past can attend.

Date: May 28, 2009

Time: 6:00-8:00 pm

**Location: Achieving Independence Center (AIC)
1118 Market Street, 2nd floor**

Refreshments and tokens will be available.

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Ambrose's commitment to thoroughly evaluating and improving services offered by the Department and its contract providers.

Because it is new, Kinnevy says one of her first objectives is to establish a brand name for the division, which encompasses Performance Management, Quality Improvement, Provider Relations and Evaluation, and Data Integration and Management Systems. "In order for us to be effective," she says, "it is important that staff, providers and stakeholders know what the division does and how it relates to the work of the Department. To that end, the Division has created a mission statement.

"The Division of Performance Management and Accountability will track the efficiency and effectiveness of our services, both internal and external. The system will be both comprehensive and transparent, taking into account the core goals and values of the Department – the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and their families. To this end,

our approach will be data-driven and evidence-based, hopefully leading to a best-practice model of service delivery that is as error-free as humanly possible and that has an optimal positive impact on our clients."

Given that accurate and timely data is an essential element of performance management and accountability, among Kinnevy's

chief priorities is data integration. "Currently, DHS has many databases that don't speak to each other," she explains. "The first thing we need to do is figure out who owns them, where the data lives, and how they can be centralized so that questions can be answered precisely and expediently."

The rollout of FACTS2 is going to be an important component of this work. In addition, the Department is planning to launch an electronic case management system called LIBRA. "As it is now," she says, "all DHS files are in huge notebooks. When the State comes in for its annual inspection, everything stops for a month while massive amounts of paper are brought out and combed through."

With an electronic case management system, all the information about a case, from the moment it is reported to the hotline, will be recorded on a single elec-

tronic file, which will be utilized by both DHS staff and providers. As a result, case information will be instantaneously accessible to everyone who needs it at any given time.

In the area of Performance Management, Kinnevy says her division has begun to develop process maps in order to examine every step of the life of a case starting from the hotline through its closing. The Department is also enhancing the way it conducts fatality reviews. The process has become more comprehensive and there is a new Fatality Review Team in place to help ensure that DHS is in compliance with Act 33, which governs fatalities.

Kinnevy notes that in light of the barrage of criticism DHS has faced over the past few years, it is important that both staff and providers understand that the purpose of her division is not just to root out poor performance, but also to better understand and highlight what the Department is doing well.

Finally, the new division will be working to improve provider relations. In the past, DHS has conducted annual site evaluations of providers. However, Kinnevy says that may not be enough, nor is it necessarily the most effective way to get dependable information about how providers are performing. Consequently, she hopes to shift the evaluation process to a more rigorous and systematic case file review and is currently looking closely at the way other systems evaluate their providers.

One likely change will be a move to randomized case file reviews on a monthly or quarterly basis. "A randomized process provides a sample that represents all cases," she explains. "Thus, on any given day we can look at ourselves and our providers and have a sense of how we are doing." She notes that one of the advantages of a randomized process is that it encourages providers to let the Department know about problems as they occur (rather than waiting for a scheduled evaluation). As a result, the Department will be in a better position to provide timely assistance, manage problems and avoid crisis.

In short, she says, "DHS is beginning to progress from merely looking at whether we and our providers are doing everything we are supposed to do, to assessing how well we are doing what we do and whether what we are doing is making a positive difference."

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