# Hancock County Youth Court Task Force

Meeting Date: January 23, 2015 │ Time: 5pm – 6:40pm │Chairman:  State Representative David Baria

## Introduction

The meeting was called to order by the chairman at 5:06 pm. Task force members present included: David Baria, Chris Daniel, Elise Epperson Deano, Cindy Burney, Cynthia Chauvin, Mark Smith, Tonya Blair, Vickie Taylor, Pam Cross, Lisa Cowand, & Brehm Bell. Senior Chancellor, Sandy Steckler also present.

## Action I: Review/Adoption of Agenda

Motion to adopt Agenda by Chris Daniel and seconded by Cynthia Chauvin. Motion carries.

## Action II: Review/Adoption of Minutes

Motion to adopt January 15, 2015 meeting minutes by Elise Epperson Deano and seconded by Chris Daniel. Motion carries.

## Action III: Public Comments

Chairman Baria opened the floor for public comments for thirty minutes asking that individuals limit their time to (2) minutes in order for everyone present who wishes to speak to be able to do so.  Concerns brought up during public comments included (1) parents court ordered to submit to routine drug testing without a history of drug usage, (2) grandparents wanting to be considered for placement in lieu of foster care placement, (3)DHS not communicating with parents, not providing correct information on services or coordinating the required services and DHS workers not following the agency's own policies, (4) concerns regarding the re-abuse of children in foster care by licensed foster parents, concerns regarding the current drug testing agency, possible discrepancies in testing, the financial gain of a single for profit agency.

## Action IV: Old Business

Chairman Baria read the proposed Mission Statement:
The HCYCTF will seek to determine the causes of the number of children in DHS custody and the means of reducing such numbers through stable and permanent reunification or placement in the best interests of the child. Motion to adopt the HCYCTF Mission Statement moved by Brehm Bell and seconded by Cindy Burney. Motion carries.

## Action V: New Business

Chairman Baria reported a recent meeting he had with the MS Supreme Court Judges and John Hudson from Adams County regarding the Parent Representative model. Supreme Court will ask for matching funds to support this project in Hancock County. This project is a pilot program with some funding coming from the Casey Foundation. Reporting out from each committee followed:
   A.  Parent Representative Committee-Brehm Bell
         Committee has initially met. Discussed the pilot Parent Representative program that is currently operating in Rankin, Forest, Madison, Adams, and Harrison County's. Concurrently, Youth Court Judge Elise Deano has met with the Hancock County Board of Supervisors to discuss the possibility of using funds from the lay Guardian Ad Litem position to fund one Parent Representative. If this occurs, it will address part of the need but not all due to the number of clients in the system. Lisa Cowand reported that the Board of Supervisors is willing to assist and is in a position to reallocate those funds in the coming days/weeks.
   B.  Coordination of Services Committee-Cynthia Chauvin reporting for Candy Murphy

Committee met on January 20. Mission Statement of the committee is to identify services to families in the DHS system provided currently, identify services needed to support families, and recommend methods to support agencies providing services. Committee will look at programming, standardization of programs, credentials of services providers, consistency of program provision, and funding source/expense to families to attend the programs. Brehm Bell suggested that there be some type of agreement with agencies providing services in an effort to better coordinate the services. One question raised for the committee to consider is who will approve service providers. It was also suggested that a questionnaire be created to get key information, the need for a central database, consideration of a lay Parent Representative (possibly explore grant funding), and the possibly of exploration into the mediation process. (Jackson County, Judge Sagalis currently utilizes dependency mediation) Brehm Bell is the Bar Association's representative on the task force and he is working with the Bar and Tonya Blair to ascertain clarification the exact number of TPR cases open and how the Bar may be able to assist.

C. Statistics Committee-Cindy Burney

Committee met and established a mission statement for their work. The Statistics Committee Identify and collect data to assist the Task Force with identifying problem areas and formulating possible solutions. January 1, 2015 is the baseline date for collecting data as agreed upon by committee members. Committee discussed the fluidity of data and the process of collecting needed data from both DHS and Youth Court. Currently, both agencies are working together on the committee to ensure that their independent data is accurate. Data points needed include (1)# of children in DHS custody, (2)Case plan goal for each child, (3)# of pending TPR's, (4) # of foster children in long term care, (5) # of foster children in family placements, (6) # of children in custody as it relates to parental drug abuse, (7) # of DHS investigations vs. new children in DHS custody, (8) # of licensed foster parents, (9) # of pending foster parent applicants.

D. Systems Committee-David Baria

Committee met since last task force meeting and identified questions that would require feedback from both DHS and Youth Court.

1. Youth Court questions
   a. What training is required and received by Youth Court staff members?
   b. Case outcome data on dispositions including the # of cases per day, # of cases per month, the timeline from start to finish of cases, and the average # of continuances per case.
2. DHS questions
   a. What training is offered to DHS employees regarding testimony and court preparation? Is the AG's office responsible?
   b. Is there a reporting system for DHS case workers who fail to comply with work responsibly?
   c. What is the time from foster parent application to approval?
   d. Is there any process in place at DHS to implement a mobile team of workers to catch up the backlog of potential foster parent certifications?
   e. Are grandparents given the same opportunities as other family members in terms of placement?
   f. # of Hancock County children placed in county vs. outside of the county or even the state
   g. Are their heightened penalties for those individuals who harm DHS workers such as teachers, law enforcement etc.?
   h. Is there any type of show cause order/hearing at the Chancery Court level to assess timeliness of case progress?
   i. Is the requirement to drug test families overused?

3.  David Baria introduced two members of the PEER Committee, Mr. Ray Wright and Ms. Sarah Williamson. PEER Committee is a fact finding arm of the legislature. Their work is used during the legislative session by Senators and Representatives. They provide reasons why and solutions to the problems they are asked to investigate. They will focus on what the reasons are for the increased number of children in foster care in Hancock County vs. other areas of the state and country. Additionally, they will look into options and resources to assist with this issue. The PEER Committee is a watchdog bi-partisan independent agency. They were asked recently to look into the foster care crisis in Hancock County and have been given authority from the chair of the committee to do this work and report their findings. The PEER Committee will take the report, ask for other information, and release a comprehensive report by early summer.
4.  Brehm Bell suggested that Senior Chancellor, Sandy Steckler execute a court order allowing the PEER committee members access to speak with Youth Court staff. Judge Steckler stated that that would not be a problem.

## Action V: Adjournment

Next meeting of the HCYCTF is set for Thursday, February 5, 2015 at 5pm.
Motion to adjourn made by Chris Daniel and seconded by Cindy Burney. Motion carries.
Meeting adjourned at 6:40pm