

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- **Background**

- Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) provides Adolescent Services, Child Protective Services, Foster Care and Adoption Services, Juvenile Services, Mental Health Services, Medical Health and Wellbeing Services, and Substance Use Services to Connecticut Residents.
- Department within Connecticut's Health and Human Services. Health and Human Services also houses the Department on Aging, Department of Public Health, Office of Early Childhood, and Department of Social Services.
- All departments under the umbrella of Health and Human Services, including the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Social Services, are operated through a state-supervised, state administered system.
- Central state office provides supervision and oversight to state-operated, regional offices that are responsible for the administration of programs and day-to-day, direct client services.
- Counties (8 total) do not play a role in the administration of programs and services related to social welfare.

- **Department of Children and Families**

- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) operates through six regions, each with 2-3 field office locations within the region.
- Although some regional/field office jurisdictions align with county divisions, they are not affiliated with the counties that they serve and all employees at the regional/field office locations are state employees.
- At one point in time, Connecticut DCF attempted to localize services by eliminating the regional offices and setting up "area offices" that essentially served as local providers similar to traditional county departments. During this time, area offices worked directly with staff at the central office; there was no regional supervision or coordination of services.
 - Closely resembled a state-supervised, county-administered system except all employees were state employees.
 - Became too cumbersome for central office to effectively and efficiently supervise the area offices.
- Regional offices and leadership were re-introduced into the system to coordinate the operation of local field offices and assist in the administration of programs.
- Current administration wants the regions to consider themselves "Mini Departments of Children and Families", meaning that the regional departments should take on a larger role in assessing community needs, advocating for the necessary resources and personnel, and providing effective and efficient services to the communities they serve.
 - Vision was not fully recognized; budget is still managed at the central office.
 - However, steps have been made to enhance the working relationship between the central office staff and Regional Administrators.

- **Division of Authority/Responsibility Between Central and Regional Offices**
 - Regional offices operate under a Regional Administrator.
 - Deputy Commissioner of Programs, a central office staff member, works closely with Regional Administrators to enhance communication and coordination between central office departments/divisions and the regional offices.
 - Regional Administrators consult with central staff regarding any substantial changes to programs, services, or administrative structure within the region and get clearance from central office before taking action.
 - Regional Administrator’s responsibility has increased since regional entities were re-introduced into the system:
 - Determine how programs and services in the region will be administered and monitored,
 - Advocate on behalf of individual field offices or the region as a whole if service needs are identified;
 - Manage local or “boutique” contracts with service providers specific to their region,
 - Function as the primary conduit to the central office for all contracted service providers for federal or state mandated programs,
 - And consult with central office staff when changes are being made that may have an effect on operations within the region.
 - The central office staff is responsible for providing oversight and supervision to regional offices in all areas related to program administration including technical assistance, budgetary guidance, legal guidance, and contract management.
 - Final decisions, especially those that require statutory or budgetary changes, must be cleared through the central office before regions may take action.
 - Although the regional office functions as the primary conduit for contracted service providers, the central office actually maintains these contracts. This can create some confusion or tension regarding who has ultimate authority over contract management for federal and state mandated programs and creates two chains of command for service providers – a direct line to the central office and one that passes through the regional office.

- **Enhancing the Working Relationship Between Central and Regional Offices**
 - Efforts are underway to ensure that the central and regional offices have an effective working relationship that best serves the communities of Connecticut.
 - In the past, regional offices operated under the direction of the central office and served as an extension of their authority.
 - Now, regional offices work in partnership with the central office to make decisions regarding program administration.
 - Regional offices are expected to maintain a thorough understanding of community needs (community experts) within their region and function as their advocates in discussions with central office. Regional offices also provide feedback to the central office regarding program implementation.
 - Central office functions as the budgetary and program experts.
 - Together, the regional and central offices come together to make decisions regarding how to best serve communities.

-
- Connecticut is in the process of developing an effective decision making process for when conflict arises between the regional and central offices regarding a specific decision or new direction for a program or service. Both entities have come to the conclusion that more feedback is necessary.
- Connecticut has taken steps to analyze their current system and make improvements at both the central office and regional offices.
 - Establishment and refinement of a program assessment group comprised of both direct service providers from regional offices and central staff that analyzes services and makes recommendations for program improvement.
 - Brought in an intermediary from the Harvard School of Government to assess Connecticut's service delivery system and make recommendations for improvement.
 - Third-party analysis of what is working and what is not working has encouraged regional and central office staff to get on the same page moving forward.
 - Representatives from the Harvard School of Government were embedded with regional staff during this process to gain a thorough understanding of how the regions were similar/different and how they communicated with central office.
 - Recommendations have been made regarding chain of command clarity and enhanced communication between regional and central office.
 - Grants and Contract Manager Position was established in each region, bringing some of the budgetary and contract expertise from the central office to the regional offices.