



COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

April 3, 2018

Hon. John Bruso
Erie County Legislator
92 Franklin St
Fourth Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202

Re: Employee Survey

Dear Legislator Bruso:

Thank you for your March 21, 2018, letter concerning an action plan for Child Protective Services and your input. Thank you also for working with our employees to help highlight issues that need to be addressed. Though none of the issues raised in the survey were a surprise, it does stress the urgency in which these issues should be addressed.

Although I have only been Acting Commissioner since December 28, 2017, I know much work has gone into the areas identified in the survey. In addition, in consultation with First Deputy Commissioner for Family Wellness Sharon Rochelle and Assistant Commissioner Catie Gavin, as well as Second Deputy Commissioner Mary Ellen Brockmyre and Special Assistant Commissioner Brian Bray, we have several initiatives planned to improve conditions for staff.

1. WORKER SAFETY:

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- We have issued cellular telephones to all CPS workers so they can call or text the police for assistance.
- In 2014, Special Investigators were added to CPS, filled with individuals with law enforcement experience. Special Investigators can expedite police checks on homes and individuals when there is a concern for safety. Special Investigators will accompany workers when a concern for safety is noted. (In the event that a Special Investigator is not available, Team Leaders can send additional staff with a worker, or a Team Leader or administrator can accompany a worker.)
- Beginning in 2015, a Case Assistant was co-located full time at Central Police Services to conduct police checks on homes.
- Erie County Sheriff's Department has provided Active Shooter and Self-Defense Training,

- Staff from child welfare divisions participate in a worker safety subcommittee to review critical incidents. If a critical incident is reported to administration, they provide support and resources to the affected staff and review to determine what may have prevented or de-escalated a situation.

Planned Initiatives:

- The Department will work with Sheriff's Office to use resources available through our Inter-Departmental agreement with the Sheriff's Office to increase collaboration and provide safety training.
- The Department will meet with the new Buffalo Police Commissioner to identify ways to improve the relationship between the two entities.

2. TOOLS TO DO THE JOB:

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- We are currently in the initial phases of the tablet roll out to CPS, this will eventually be expanded to other areas. The tablets have software that will make it a paperless operation, and eliminate many manual processes of CPS workers.
- Co-located a Domestic Violence Advocates from Haven House, Licensed Clinical Social Workers and Substance Abuse Counselors from Endeavor, Medicaid Service Coordinator from People Inc. and Sex Trafficking advocate from International Institute.
- Quarterly Resource Fairs have begun to be planned for staff to learn about valuable community resources. The first resources fair was held in March at the Central Library. We received universally positive feedback from the event.
- In-service by Community Connections of New York regarding Arounja mapping application to identify community resources.

Planned Initiatives:

- Ongoing collaborations with state partners and contract providers to increase the tools and knowledge to do the job.
- DSS plans on developing a comprehensive guide to resources by topic area to assist caseworkers when helping families.
- Initiative to assist with clients from immigrant and refugee communities.
- DSS is in the process of co-locating a Help Me Grow individual within its Department to allow clients to access services for developmentally delayed children. Hiring four additional Case Assistants to help complete simpler tasks on cases.

3. STAFF TRAINING:

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- Various trainings through New York State Human Services Learning Center, Department of Social Services Human Resources Development Division, and community-based organizations is communicated frequently through supervisors and the weekly In the Loop newsletter.
- Staff was engaged in conversations about what training needs they have and this has been and will continue to be pursued to meet the needs of staff. Cluster Trainings are developed based on needs identified by workers and supervisors to address areas that need development.
- Various tools have been developed through staff input to ensure good case practice and worker support.

Planned Initiatives:

- Continuous staff development opportunities are being pursued by administration.
- ECDSS has volunteered to participate in the Father's toolkit pilot.
- A training plan was developed with OCFS to enhance staff development.
- Family Engagement and Coached Family Visits training have been requested through OCFS.

4. SUPPORT FROM SUPERVISOR:

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- Caseload Review software was developed with input from supervisors to develop a computer based system to provide feedback on cases in one central place.
- Peer Mentoring for new staff and supervisors.
- Human Resources Development division is having many supervisory training classes available as it is their "Year of the Supervisor".
- Addition of an Administrative Director in 2018

Planned Initiatives:

- Development of more comprehensive supervision training, mentoring and capacity building.
- Succession planning initiative.

5. WORK-LIFE BALANCE:

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- Solution Focused Trauma Informed Care, which all staff are being trained on, promotes an approach to staff to take care of self so that you can take care of others.
- CPS workers are allowed to do some work from home. Staff may volunteer to work from home (using their personal internet service) to input case notes and finalize investigations and Connections tasks due as needed.

- Flexibility in work schedules when caseload and coverage allows.
- Piloted a four day, ten hour per day work week.
- Lactation space provided.

Planned Initiatives:

- Implementation of four-day, ten-hour schedules when staffing stabilizes.

6. JOB STRESS:

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- Conducted a Health and Wellness Conference in 2017 to help workers manage the stress and trauma of their job.
- Strive to Thrive retreat offered at Beaver Hollow so individuals can manage the stress that accompanies their position.
- Yoga offered at 478 Main Street.
- Team building encouraged within units and building initiatives and contests.
- Therapeutic dog visits.
- Provided quiet areas to work or relax during the workday.

7. STAFF APPRECIATION

Previous/Ongoing Initiatives:

- Work groups have been established to look into better recognition of staff.
- Staff are recognized regularly through email, In the Loop and, team meetings and other team events.
- Holiday Door Decorating contest to increase morale during holiday season.
- Staff Luncheon and Potluck Dinners.

Planned Initiatives:

- Administration plans to use the feedback from the work groups to implement more ongoing and meaningful staff appreciation.
- Events to build morale and a sense of family/team are being planned.

8. AGENCY COMMUNICATION

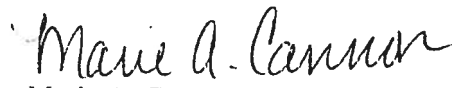
Previous Initiatives:

- There is a weekly newsletter that goes to all staff about the operations of the Department titled DSS Blast. Family Wellness staff receive a second newsletter specific to child welfare issues titled, In the Loop.
- Department-wide mid-managers meeting every quarter.
- Facilitation of extra-curricular activities, such as a running club, to create organic connections across the agency.

Planned Initiatives:

- The Department is working to improve the availability of internal knowledge and documents through the Department's Sharepoint site.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marie A. Cannon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marie" and last name "Cannon" clearly legible.

Marie A. Cannon, MSW
Commissioner

cc: Clerk of the Legislature
County Executive Mark Poloncarz