

**NICOLE POORE**  
*Majority Leader*  
STATE SENATOR  
12<sup>th</sup> District



SENATE  
STATE OF DELAWARE  
411 LEGISLATIVE AVENUE  
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

**DHSS Reorganization Committee**  
Tuesday, October 8, 2019 at 6:30 pm  
Carvel Building's 2nd Floor Auditorium

**Task Force Members Present:**

Senator Nicole Poore  
Michael Houghton  
Senator Anthony Delcollo  
Representative Kendra Johnson  
Representative Michael Smith  
Secretary Kara Odom Walker  
Amy Bonner  
Terri Hancharik (on behalf of Kyle Hodges)  
Christina Bryan  
Melissa Hopkins (on behalf of Sheila Bravo)  
Carolyn Petrak  
Dr. Anne Farley  
John Whitelaw  
Lolita Lopez  
Dr. Devona Williams

**Attendees:**

Susan Holloway, DSAMH  
Cara Sawyer, DSAMH  
Elizabeth Romero, DSAMH  
Karyl Rattay, DPH  
Ted Mermigos, DCSS  
Ruth Lavelle, parent  
Kiki Evinger, DHSS  
Terry Olson, The Arc of Delaware  
Cynthia Manlove, DHSS  
Jill Fredel, DHSS  
Christine Schiltz, PGS  
Janet Villareal, DHSS  
Melissa Smith, DSAAPD  
Dawn Alexander, Colonial School District  
Alexia Wolf, DSAMH  
Monica Gonzales, DHR  
Elisabeth Scheneman, DHSS  
Deb Hamilton, HGP  
Matt Bittle, State News  
Ned Bates, Wilmington University

Danielle Mess, Wilmington University  
Henry Metz  
Verna Hensley, Easter Seals  
Stephanie Denning, HMA  
Amanda White, HMA  
Carol McLaughlin  
Steven Scotolatti  
Michelle Spencer

**Senator Nicole Poore, Chair**, convened the meeting at 6:35 pm.

**Senator Poore** provided an overview of the goal of the Committee. She emphasized that public engagement would be a major goal of the Committee process. Senator Poore then invited Committee members to provide introductions.

Task force members introduced themselves and their respective organizations.

**Senator Poore** provided an overview of the agenda.

**Alonna Berry** stated that the Committee will record meetings and post minutes online according to FOIA guidelines. She also provided an overview of the rules for public comment.

**Michael Houghton**, Co-Chair, invited Secretary Walker to provide some preliminary comments on the history of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS).

**Secretary Kara Odom Walker** provided comments on the important work performed by the DHSS. She mentioned that as Secretary, she continues to look for opportunities to engage the public. Secretary Walker provided an overview of the budget and number of divisions. She then asked DHSS employees in the room to stand and thanked them for their work. She also distributed copies of an overview of DHSS's current strategic planning process. Secretary Walker stated that the results of the survey conducted by Health Management Associates indicate that services are well organized within the Department. She also mentioned that there is a need for support in talent management and information sharing. She commented that twenty-two other states are organized in a consolidated manner.

**Mr. Houghton** commented that DHSS represents an accretion of responsibilities over a thirty-year period. He noted that it is timely and unsurprising that there would be a review of the agency. Mr. Houghton also commented that the enabling resolution calls on the Committee to follow DHSS's strategic plan but that recommendations are not bound to the results of the strategic plan.

**Senator Poore** stated that the structure of Committee subgroups will be decided based on input from members. However, she commented that subgroups should consider issues outlined in the resolution, including: impact to personnel, service to consumers, and federal funding. She also commented that the Committee has until March to produce recommendations.

**Dr. Anne Farley** added that the Department has vestiges of a bureaucracy that was built in the 1970s. Dr. Farley added that legislators are uniquely positioned to hear directly from constituents who are impacted by the agency. She added that consumers not only benefit from services but entire communities.

**Dr. Devona Williams** stated that a subgroup should look at overall processes and barriers to efficiencies in terms of data integration.

**Senator Anthony Delcollo** stated that the whole breadth of the agency's work is connected to state statutes. He added that the Committee should examine consistencies between regulations and statutes. Senator Delcollo stated that while it is important to consider best practices, compliance needs to be examined as well.

**Melissa Hopkins** commented that it could be interesting to look at relationships with contracted professionals and how DHSS works with external partners.

**Mr. Houghton** commented that if the Committee examines relationships with contractual partners, it should not be limited to one or two aspects. He added that the Committee should examine whether the state is receiving high-quality services from external partners.

**Ms. Hopkins** added that the subgroup could also examine whether the state should extend more capacity to external partners.

**Mr. Houghton** underscored the need to provide value to our citizens. He noted that the state cannot simply see the solution as spending more money.

**Senator Delcollo** highlighted the need to identify opportunities for efficiencies in state service delivery.

**Senator Poore** provided context on the impact of deinstitutionalization on the agency and healthcare costs. She remarked that the cost of care should have decreased because of moving individuals out of institutions and back to their communities but that adjustments need to be made to ensure that caregivers are supported.

**Ms. Berry** repeated back key themes from the discussion of subgroups. She added that there would be a follow-up email asking Committee members to rank subgroup ideas. She also added that the current thinking is that subgroups would be chaired by Committee members but there would be an opportunity to invite additional support from others outside of the Committee.

**Senator Poore** provided an overview on the importance of public engagement and asked Committee members for suggestions on the best strategy to gather input from the public.

**Carolyn Petrak** remarked that the Committee should utilize a variety of methods because the populations served by DHSS are diverse and have varying comfort levels with technology.

**Secretary Walker** commented that she would be happy to share the starting point for this work. She shared information on the employee survey that DHSS conducted as part of the agency's strategic planning process.

**Mr. Houghton** remarked that survey responses for a Department-driven process may be different than a more independent, third-party survey.

**Secretary Walker** replied that the Department relied on an independent entity, Health Management Associates, to conduct the survey.

**Dr. Williams** remarked that public input should be gathered throughout the process, specifically, in the beginning, middle, and end.

**Senator Delcollo** added that social media should be utilized, if possible. He commented that many people, including individuals impacted by the recommendations of the Committee, use social media.

**Dr. Farley** commented that it would be helpful to identify the constituencies for each division of DHSS. She underscored the need to reach and engage the communities that are impacted by the services that DHSS provides.

**Lolita Lopez** commented that the Committee should not overlook the work done by DHSS during the strategic planning process, which she noted involved a considerable investment.

**Ms. Berry** provided a high-level overview of the discussion points for public engagement strategies.

**Senator Poore** then invited public comment.

**Dawn Alexander** from the Colonial School District stated that she has worked with children with special needs throughout her career. She expressed gratitude for the work of the Committee and asked the Committee to consider moving the lead agency for early childhood programs from DHSS to the Department of Education.

**Terry Olson** from the Arc of Delaware said that the work of the Committee is timely and important to people who benefit from DHSS services. He also remarked that individuals with disabilities as well as providers have not been surveyed in a meaningful way.

**Henry Metz** stated that DHSS needs additional oversight. He commented that the agency has a program running in his neighborhood that is still not licensed and zoned correctly.

**Ruth Lavelle** presented a picture of her son Matthew and stated that he is the reason that she attended the Committee hearing. She stated that he will lose school services in two-years and expressed concern about the quality of the services that he is eligible for after he turns twenty-one. Lastly, she highlighted the need to increase funding for direct support professionals.

**Mr. Houghton** expressed concern over two items in the SWOT analysis provided by Dr. Walker, which listed the legislative task force and the state merit system as threats. He invited Secretary Walker to provide additional context on those two items at this meeting or the next.

**Senator Delcollo** shared a story of a constituent who has a son with disabilities that was able to maintain a job with the help of a support professional. He added that when the funding for this individual's support professional went away, he was no longer able to maintain a job. Senator Delcollo stated the importance of empowering all people to ensure that they can contribute to society at their highest potential.

**Senator Poore** stated that she had received multiple emails in the last day that indicated the need to improve service delivery. She provided an overview of each email and the input that she received.

**Secretary Walker** commented that the items in the SWOT analysis were not massaged for a political context. She added that she is looking forward to the Committee process and identifying areas for improvement.

**Ms. Berry** said that she would send a follow up meeting with the dates for future meetings. She expressed the intention to schedule all dates through March so that Committee members could plan accordingly.

**Senator Poore** asked Committee members to consider serving as the Chairs of subgroups.

**Mr. Houghton** thanked meeting attendees for their participation.

**Senator Poore** adjourned the meeting at 7:36 pm.