

TRANSCRIPT

Testimony from Commissioner John Stephen,  
NH Department of Health and Human Services  
to the NH Commission on the Status of Men

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Speaker List:

STEPHEN: Commissioner John Stephen, DHHS

BISHOP: Maggie Bishop, Director of the Division of Children, Youth, and Families, DHHS

WILLIAMS: Attorney John Williams, Office of Child Support, DHHS

MATTERN: Grace Mattern, Exec. Director, NH Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

BICKFORD: Rep. David A. Bickford

MASTROMARINO: Dr. Joseph Mastromarino, Chair, NH CSM

GEANOULIS: Commissioner Michael Geanoulis, NH CSM

LERANDEAU: Commissioner Alfred Lerandean, NH CSM

MASTROMARINO (CSM): For those of you who are not aware, I would introduce John Stevens, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services. Welcome.

STEPHEN (DHHS): Thank you, thank you doctor. I just want for the record so you're all aware, my name is John Stephen, Commissioner for the Department of Health and Human Services, with me today is John Williams from our Division of Child Support, and also Maggie Bishop, who is our newly appointed Director of the Division of Children, Youth, and Families. Nancy Rollins has moved on to the directorship of the Division of Community-based Care Services. So I wanted to make sure they were here. There were some issues that John had brought to my attention; I'm really privileged to be here because I think that there's a lot of things that I've heard that this Commission's been working on that is very consistent with the policy that we are here instilling in many of our field staff and individuals at the department, employees. So, I don't know what order you want to take it Mr. Chairman, I've got a couple of things here that I was asked by John to provide some information. Whatever you'd like; whatever your pleasure is.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Okay. Well certainly, I think that there are a couple of major topics we wanted to cover, clarify for our own purposes, and the first on the agenda was the selection process for the vendor - for the distribution of the domestic violence funds, that's under section 173-B:15, protection of persons from domestic violence.

STEPHEN (DHHS): Okay. So the first issue would be the domestic violence funds. I guess I'll start with the grant. The domestic violence grant program in our department was established pursuant to law, RSA 173-B. And in sections 17 and 18 the statute says that the DHHS Commissioner shall designate a coordinator to distribute these funds, which we've done. And the coordinator is an agency or organization that demonstrates the capacity to coordinate distribution of these funds so that the full range of services are available throughout the state, and that was an important legislative intent.

RSA 173-B:20 specifies that the coordinating organization must do a number of things and one of them is support local domestic violence programs, work with education, health, law enforcement, medical and other types of agencies to promote prevention, which is really important, and provide training for courts and legal advocates, and then also serve as a clearinghouse of information about domestic violence. Then the coordinating agency must also provide public announcements of available funds for local programs. And the contractor shall be an agency that has demonstrated successful experience in a number of areas: services advocacy, systems advocacy, statewide planning, public awareness, and knowledge of services. So this grant program, we put out a bid, an RFP, consistent with the statute. Since I've been Commissioner it's my understanding that there's only been one program that's ever submitted a bid that met the criteria, is that correct, Director?

So the issue is to make sure that we continue to monitor the program to meet the legislative requirements. So the question that was asked is how does DCYF monitor the contracted services, and I can answer that. Presently the Coalition is the coordinator, the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, with whom we have a number of programs that we've worked over the years with. I have also my prior experience as the Assistant Commissioner of Safety so we're very much knowledgeable of their activities and worked with them in a number of capacities, and I've always found that relationship to be very positive.

Under this program the Coalition provides regular reports to DCYF, that includes services related to this program. They also, the domestic violence coordinator - DCYF actually - monitors the expenditures of the funds through the reports. We have site visits. We do regular contact, that's something they've asked our staff to make sure we do so we can make sure that a contractor - any contractor for that matter - is meeting the specifications that are outlined in the scope of services. We've also met with local crisis center directors and staff throughout the state where we ask questions regarding services, and we also work with the office of the Attorney General to ensure that these funds are directed to direct services. No funds - and I want to make that clear - no funds through this contact support lobbying, or direct provisions of legal services to victims of domestic violence. In particular, I've been recently informed that some members have questioned lobbying activities, and I appreciate that question, I want to let you know that.

I've asked my Director to ensure that no funds under any shape or form that the State of NH uses in my Department, through my Department, are used for lobbying activities contrary to the strictures of the statute and the parameters of the scope of services as well. In fact today I will be sending a letter out to the coordinator to make sure and I've been told by the coordinator, or not the coordinator but the Director has been assured that no state funds have been used for lobbying activities. So I just want to make that clear and that is something that I will continue to monitor. But that's, to our knowledge that is not happening. I know I was asked to review that matter and we did review it, and I'm going to also provide a copy of that letter to this committee.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Thank you.

STEPHEN (DHHS): The other question was asked, what other contracts does DCYF have with the Coalition? DCYF also maintains the statewide Prevention, Intervention and Response domestic violence contract that was issued in July 1st of 2005, and that is with the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. This was after an RFP process, and this supports direct services to

all victims of domestic violence in all geographic areas of the state. This contract also supports the hiring of domestic violence specialists in our district offices, and I've seen first hand as Commissioner how vitally important that is, and we have domestic violence counselors that work hand in hand with our employees and in times of crisis are there to help. Currently there's also funds, I believe, that come out of the Violence Against Women Act of the Department of Justice that support some of these activities as well. So those are some of the other funds, other support activities that we at the Department support.

So, the other question was what are the sources of funds for that contract, and the primary source of funds is the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act grant which is administered under the US DHHS, which comes to us. It's the ACF, it's the Administration of Children and Families. The formula grant is designed as a pass-through only, and it's intended to support local direct services that prevent and address domestic violence. We have been eligible for that grant since 1997.

Secondary sources of funds from this contract are through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and Preserving Safe and Stable Families grants, and these are also formula grants that come through ACF. There are 4B funds that also come through DCYF for a full range of prevention and intervention services provided by and contracted, again, through DCYF to support safety, permanency, and the well-being of children. There are some other activities that we do jointly, but basically, I think the question was namely what are some of the funding sources, and I think I've identified most of them. There are other activities, and I'd be glad to answer any questions in that regard.

GEANOULIS (CSM): Could have been a question from a few sen...

STEPHEN (DHHS): And if I can't answer it, the Director will, that's why I want to make sure she's here.

GEANOULIS (CSM): Let me ask a... I had a question from a few lines earlier regarding your admonition to departments, that there should be no state funds used for lobbying.

STEPHEN (DHHS): Yes.

GEANOULIS (CSM): How long have you had that letter in effect?

STEPHEN (DHHS): Well, I've never had to issue a statement to that effect because to my knowledge it was pretty self-explanatory in all the scope of services of just what the scope is identified as. I read every one of the contracts I send over to [???], and nowhere, in no contract does the scope of service involve lobbying. In fact, to the criticism of many, I decided not to go further with one advocacy group's funding because it dealt with funding an advocacy group and their activities when I thought the state taxpayer should not be paying for advocacy. And I am a firm believer of that. And that particular organization, the House just passed a bill, in fact, to re-fund that entire organization, just passed the House.

GEANOULIS (CSM): But at that point...

STEPHEN (DHHS): That's it, it was taken out of the lineup but passed to the finance division. And that one organization's now almost in the Senate, so I can tell you I have a steadfast principle of not using taxpayer dollars to fund any advocacy, because at some point down the road they may not be in the best interest of the taxpayer, they may even be contrary to what the

Department believes. So we have to be real careful when we deal with funding for advocacy-related issues. I am very, I mean, I trust the Director of the Domestic Violence Coalition in my dealings; I have no reason to not trust the Director. And I know my Director has had conversations, and there has been assurances that there is no state funds used, or federal funds for that matter, for lobbying activities that come out of Department of Health and Human Services.

And again I want to make double-sure that the Director is on notice of that and I appreciate the fact that she has been open and we will continue that dialog though, we need to continue to monitor.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Continuation on that?

GEANOULIS (CSM): Yes, thank you. The Coalition has been involved in lobbying activities for some time, Commissioner Stephen, I'd at least wonder if you're aware of that, or if you had not been aware of that, if you should be aware of it from this point forward and...

STEPHEN (DHHS): I don't know, I mean I assume they meet with representatives a lot, depending on if you classify as lobbying it depends on the issue, I would say. But I can tell you that with regard to the funding that we give to the Coalition, that none of the funds that we use, from what I've been assured, are used for lobbying activity. And that's primarily all I can handle from the Department of Health and Human Services, that's my... what our issues...

GEANOULIS (CSM): Neither directly or indirectly?

STEPHEN (DHHS): I mean we'll probably have to have those discussions further, but I think that...

BICKFORD (REP): May I?

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Representative Bickford?

BICKFORD (REP): Hi, everybody. Yeah, I've been very concerned about this lobbying, as a representative, trying to go forward with bills, there were two bills that we worked together on, John, which was 529 was one of them and to a lesser degree probably 1580 which is a parenting time and adjustment bill, and here before me is the opposition letter from the Coalition against that, and there isn't the slightest inkling for a link between that and domestic violence or their mission, whatsoever. So I must say I take great exception to them lobbying on behalf of that letterhead there. I also have on 529 a letter that came to the Child and Law Committee opposing that legislation, which is contrary to the Department's position, and I also have a 32-page brief that was put together by the University of New Hampshire, it says for the NH Coalition on Domestic Violence, against our legislation, again. So they may not be using state funds but they're doing somehow to get people over here, two people over here all the time, all the time might be the wrong word, but as far as I know it's all the time, lobbying specifically against these issues. I've yet to be to a Committee that they're not there. So they've got a very well-represented here and that representation is not in the interests of the Coalition's mission. I can take no exception to the work that they do, they probably do a fine job where they're supposed to be working, but they're working outside of that arena. Now, and I have to say I am very disturbed by it and I don't know if it's being done through shifting money around somehow, maybe because it's private funding somehow.

But if it is, I think it shouldn't be mixed. I don't think it should be coming under, where they got so much federal and state funding, and if they're getting private money on the side to do lobbying, I don't think they should be doing that. I think they should set up, or somebody should set up a separate organization or something, but I think it's an abuse of their position to be sending these letters out totally contrary to our missions.

STEPHEN (DHHS): But I just think that, Representative, those questions have to be addressed to the Coalition. I can just tell you that I'm satisfied that they're not using taxpayer dollars at least to administer continue make sure I'm doubly satisfied but I understand the question. What I think is that a notification could be made in any of those letters that put people on notice that the dollars used for lobbying come from other sources. I mean, but you can't... I don't think you can restrict their ability... to address significant pieces of legislation. I just...

BICKFORD (REP): Well that's what I'm wondering about, you know. I mean...

STEPHEN (DHHS): I don't know...

BICKFORD (REP): You know, if we had the Department of Transportation in here on a family law bill we'd say, "What's this about, here?" Or some other agency making claims that their mission is over here, yet working somewhere else. And I'm going, "Where's that money coming from?" They've shown in their tax return \$3000 on lobbying, well that means somebody's working for below minimum wage here. Maybe we...

STEPHEN (DHHS): Well I don't know, that's another issue you need to look at if you want. But in my mind, again, I'm satisfied...

BICKFORD (REP): Sure, I...

STEPHEN (DHHS): ...that we have a scope of service, they comply with the scope of service and they do it well.

BICKFORD (REP): And I'm not criticizing you, John, I'm just giving information out.

STEPHEN (DHHS): All right, I understand where you're going, I just want to be clear that we've never had a reason, in the years since I've been Commissioner, never had a reason to question the use of the funds and I would say the commitment to meeting a collective goal of ensuring the health and safety of individuals in the community from domestic violence whether that be male or female. And I have not seen anything that I question mark.

BICKFORD (REP): And I don't question that either.

STEPHEN (DHHS): So that's where I'm coming from.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): I appreciate it. Grace, would you be willing to make a comment that both Amanda Grady and Linda Griebisch are registered as lobbyists with the NH state government and their organization that they represent is the NH Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. I don't know if that makes them full time, I don't know what their position is in terms of full time or not.

MATTERN (NHCADSV): No, their positions are public policy positions and they track any hours that are lobbying separately and they have to be paid for out of private dollars.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Okay. I just thought it'd be easier to ask you directly.

MATTERN (NHCADSV): Actually by state law, there's a fairly new state law that requires that any funds that are going to be used for lobbying be physically segregated, so we have a separate bank account that physically segregates the private dollars that are used for lobbying, and then those are used to pay the wages for any hours that are lobbying hours. And that's reflected in, you know, we're audited every year by an independent auditor, we fully comply with all provisions of OMB circular A-133 around federal funds, so...

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Okay, so then to Representative Bickford your question comes down to even though that there are no public funds or VAWA funds being used to pay for any lobbying efforts for men, that the question is then of the propriety of an entity which has a financial contract with the state, to then lobby directly to the state for things which may or may not be in their best interest as a financial contractor.

BICKFORD (REP): Well, as long as... I haven't seen this, the Attorney General does not have any other papers than what I have here, unless it's something that came in recently on this hours of the lobbyists, and how much they're paid and stuff like that. All it shows is lobbying activity of non-electing public charities, \$3302, that's the most recent. My concern is an organization that goes way off its track, its mission - not that it doesn't do its mission - but it goes way off. And it is telling, I don't know who they're telling, but they're getting those funds from somewhere to do that lobbying that has nothing to do with what they're advertising to do. So there's a mixing going on here, or there's a ...

MASTROMARINO (CSM): So I mean you can use private funds to lobby then in the name of a contracted public financial entity?

BICKFORD (REP): Yes, now it brings to my question, is how much public funding do they need if they're getting private funds?

LERANDEAU (CSM): I have a question.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Gus?

LERANDEAU (CSM): Why can't we get the Commissioner here, we're really discussing what the Commission is doing, let's kind of get back, I mean this is a subject for another day and another time is...

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Actually, to a certain extent it is germane to what John Steven came to talk about because I think that if we don't get to start talking about it sometimes all in the same room it gets a little bit confusing and then someone sends someone else a letter and then everyone interprets things differently, so I don't think that it's...

BICKFORD (REP): Gus, the way I bring it up, your Commission here has endorsed bills that this organization's come against and I'm saying, what business do they have coming against it with somebody else's funding?

LERANDEAU (CSM): Well wait a minute, I think to me we have the Commissioner here to discuss the questions he was presented with. Let's get all that taken care of first then get back into this other business. Then if you've got to get to the other business do it another time, let's get back to where we started from.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Well certainly then I guess the question still is before the Commissioner in one form or the other in terms if there is some type of code, in terms of when does lobbying by a contracted entity become a problem? I guess that's the best, I can only say that very broadly because, I'm trying to think of an example where if you have someone who's contracted to collect trash do you then, is it appropriate that they turn around and then start lobbying against all sorts of recycling bills?

STEPHEN (DHHS): Well I guess my point would be, I don't believe (and maybe the lobbying law that was just passed says something), but as far as the state agency is concerned, all my focus is on whether the contract, the terms of the contract and the scope of services are met. Now I can't tell someone what they can and cannot say. And if they want to speak - but what I can do and yet I think that you need to understand my feelings because... I do not want any of these funds to be used for lobbying activity because at some point we may be on the different page and I'm using taxpayer dollars here.

So, in fact I've had this happen in the past where I've had to call a contractor in and say, "I understand you were at the legislature and we were on different pages, what is going on here?", and we had a discussion. There's no, I'm not aware of any law that restricts my ability, but I can say to that vendor, "I'm not going to sign that contract next time it comes to my desk, unless you stop doing what you're doing," that's the power I have as Commissioner. And that's what I've done in the past; I've tried to be very careful of what the taxpayer dollars are being used for, and I think DCYF does the same and so does DCSS. So I think we're all on the same page it's just that the question is not properly directed towards our Department and I think that maybe there's something where the legislation that Grace had mentioned has something to do with lobbying activity. But the legislature could pass a law at any time that deals with that issue. I'm worried about the contract, and I can tell you that I'm very happy with the service we're getting.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): That, is that a yearly contract, or is that biennial?

STEPHEN (DHHS): I think we can, is it a year or two years?

MATTERN (NHCADSV): Two years.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): It's biennial. Okay. The, most certainly, it would be time to move on to some of the other questions, and you've provided us with some of the information here, we were just...

STEPHEN (DHHS): On the statistics?

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Statistics, and the, looks like it's roughly broken down to about 90...

STEPHEN (DHHS): So, five percent on the, five percent you said? This is probably, you're getting this data, we just, we spent a lot of time to get this for you. It's not that easy to drill this down, so we did the best we could.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Right.

STEPHEN (DHHS): But I think that what you're seeing is consistent with what we thought would be reached by our program service.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Right, I think that's basically consistent, relative

historically, with the numbers we've seen.

STEPHEN (DHHS): I just want to be clear that when you see these low numbers - and I think John can attest to this - that we've got to remember that at the end of the day we want what's, the DCYF, what's in the best interest of the child, and that's our goal there. And over here we really promote shared, we want to promote shared parenting. So there are two goals here. So when you look at numbers, I just want, from where I sit I just want to let you know, I don't care if the male number is one, or five thousand, ten thousand, and the female numbers are different, it doesn't make a difference in terms of those numbers to where I sit. What's in the best interest of the child? Shared parenting. That's the promotion of shared parenting. So that's the overall - you talk about mission - that's our overall goal.

We received a call the other day from one of the senators who had an individual who was a father, who had custody of the child in a certain area of the state. The mom lived in another state, and the mom was supposed to pay child support and there was arrearages that built up over \$16,000 and they wanted to know what we were doing to recover.

John's department immediately got on the phone, we put some calls in, there's a hearing April 14th, the County Attorney got right on it. The mom is paying up a certain amount, and there's going to be a question that the child is emancipating in a few months down the road, but we're not stopping. We're going to continue to make sure those arrearages are paid; doesn't matter who it is. That's the goal we have in our Department. So when you look at these numbers I want to make sure that you understand that that's how we look at it. And I think that, and I've had meetings with my division directors that make sure that policy trickles down to the field staff as well.

STEPHEN (DHHS): And another question I had is that things are tight and people try to get funds from whatever available source and Mr. Williams here certainly in the child support, I can't tell you the name of the bill, maybe when we're finished, the one that went ahead and basically mandated that unless the judge said otherwise, for child support to be automatically collected from paychecks. And that's a federally funded, federally driven program which does end up funneling some funds into the NH, I guess the general fund that it goes into, I would assume, and it would not be so obtuse as to suggest that the Division or anybody would say "Well, gee we don't want to support what seems to be right because we don't want to lose our fund exchange." But certainly when I went to the hearing on 1580, I heard that comment specifically, several people who were opposed to the bill saying, "Well this is ridiculous, we're shooting ourselves in the foot if we buy this because we're going to lose so much funding because of the loss of the funds being filtered through where, whether they're going this direction, that direction, or any other direction." I don't know if you have a comment to that or would like to comment briefly on that.

WILLIAMS (DHHS): Thank you very much Dr. Mastromarino. I will tell you that I actually started in the Division, I was very privileged to get to work in front of, actually in this room, with the Children and Family Law Committee, and I've had the opportunity of working with Representative Bickford, both from the very beginning of the days, and the bill that he referenced is House Bill 559. And what I would say about that, that bill came about as a result of a very good faith intention on behalf of Representative Bickford to take out of the system those people who otherwise would be complying with their child support obligations. The barrier that both the state department and also the general court had, at the legislature, is that there's a federal mandate that if TANF benefits are being expended in those cases, there has to

be a mandatory wage assignment set up in those cases. So working through the course of that legislation, there's actually a compromise piece of legislation that resulted in some very positive changes in the law. And from that point in time, and working with Representative Bickford, I must say that the department has a very positive relationship with the House Child and Family Law Committee, in terms of trying to assist as a resource because we're very careful to keep it arm's length that the policy considerations and decisions are made by those of the general court and the legislature but we've certainly been working very cooperatively with such very venerable people such as Representative Bickford on these very positive legislative initiatives to promote meaningful participation of both parents in their children's lives. And I can say looking over at Representative Bickford we certainly have come light years away from 1999 on HB 559 to where we are here with Commissioner John Steven with the Department in terms of very positive legislation that promotes a very beneficial impact to the children and also to the parents of children here in NH and translates into very positive economic wellbeing of these children.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Okay. Any further questions for the Commissioner about the... Mike, you had some specific questions I think about absent fathers and stuff and I know that this... I don't even know that data is mineable.

GEANOULIS (CSM): My question about absent fathers has to do with a wider spectrum than just the child support. I wanted to get a handle if we could if it was at all possible. When the bill that formed this Commission on the Status of Men was designed and written, there was a statement made in there that this Commission should determine the extent to which fatherless children are the largest users of state-funded services, or something like that, I can't remember the exact wording. And I've searched and searched and I could not get a handle on where that comment came from, but it seemed like to me like a reasonable statement to make with what we know about the poverty rate of fatherless families and all the difficulties that accrue.

I was wondering what, if we could get some handle on some data regarding the population of your various services in which fathers are not at home. I don't mean, I'm talking about biological fathers, not stepfathers or live-in boyfriends or cohabitations or anything like that. It just seems to me we that could get a lot more support for what we're trying to do here if the taxpayer were to discover that, "Gee if we could get higher levels of father involvement we wouldn't have to be paying so much for state funded services." I've already made contact with I believe Bill Bolton and I've had my notes on that somewhere regarding the population of the birth certificates that are coming down. I asked him if he could give me some data on the fatherless rates. I asked him specifically how many children are coming down with birth certificates on which the father's not named and on which father's name is different from that of the child, and it's five percent in each category, and I was just hoping to be able to compare that with what the population in your organization would be, what percent of your population has a fatherless problem, and I hope it's okay to call fatherlessness a problem. In some places it's not considered a problem, but I hope you can sympathize with what I'm trying to develop.

STEPHEN (DHHS): Well, I tend to think that it's going to be awfully difficult to get that data, but I mean I know where you're going, the fact of the matter is I think in DCYF the former director and I had these conversations as well where she agrees that there's an emotional issue that leads to mental health problems by not having the attachment of the father. And how much of that creates problems with DCYF down the road, to quantify that is extremely difficult with the vast array of services that we perform. I don't know...

GEANOULIS (CSM): Would it be possible to get figures on the percent of such cases in which the father is not listed on the birth certificate of the child or where the father's name is different from that of the child on the birth certificate? Or a third category, homes in which there is no father at all?

STEPHEN (DHHS): I mean if I, personally before your answer if we still had access to the birth certificate information, I'd try to help you out but I've been waiting eight, nine months just for some basic data from the database so I don't know where we'd go look to get anything.

GEANOULIS (CSM): I think I'd be willing to wait eight or nine months.

STEPHEN (DHHS): I'll try, but it seems awfully difficult even to get health safety information.

BICKFORD (REP): Can you expand on that for us, do you know what the problem is?

STEPHEN (DHHS): I think there's a serious problem; I think that I've raised this with the subcommittees that my Director of Public Health needs information quickly regarding cancer issues and others that we need for health and safety. We need to put data and reports out to the public, epidemiologists need data, and it always seems to be a problem trying to get that data now that we transferred it over. And I've met with a few representatives, I've met with the Secretary of State, talked to them to try to work it out with Mr. Bolton right now, but...

BICKFORD (REP): Well, if the discussion includes Mr. Bolton now, then...

STEPHEN (DHHS): Well I wish that if you talk to Mr. Bolton that you would just ask him in a nice way, "Would you please try to work well with Director Cooney" The information Public Health needs is vitally important... and I'd appreciate that.

BICKFORD (REP): Cooney, what was the name? Director Cooney?

STEPHEN (DHHS): Yes, and he'll know what you're talking about... And I think we've got to look at, we can't be so, the problem is that release of that information is so critically important...

BICKFORD (REP): On a timely basis, you mean?

STEPHEN (DHHS): ...on a timely basis, especially for policy decisions that we have to make, I know this is getting off the beaten path, but the doctor understands this, it's a Public Health matter and when we start getting entangled in - between state departments now - on what is the privacy implication, and what is the problem. You're talking about two state departments sharing information; it shouldn't be a problem. To me, that needs to be further discussed and I've worked with the legislature on this as well.

BICKFORD (REP): I'd certainly be willing to help out best I can.

STEPHEN (DHHS): I would appreciate that.

BICKFORD (REP): Because I've been in discussions with him and the fellow over at courts that does their IT information and we've got a bill coming forward and we're thinking about trying to get another person, but one of the problems they have is getting a piece of paper from a court and then having

to log it all in, and it's just very time consuming. I know they've lost a person, so I don't know if that's part of it or not. Do you think it's manpower?

STEPHEN (DHHS): In this case the data is there.

BICKFORD (REP): It's already electronically...?

STEPHEN (DHHS): Yes, the data's there and it can be transferred to Public Health, but I know that's getting on another direction. Director, you had something to add to that?

BISHOP (DHHS): In response to the question relative to getting the number of absent fathers or fathers on birth certificates, that drill down may not be so easy to get. But within DCYF at least, we like many states who have recently gone through a federal review, have identified the need to locate absent parents, engage them in the kids' care, we're dealing with children who are in foster care, so that we have been able to demonstrate our efforts to reasonably make efforts to reunify with both parents. And nationally I know they report that states have done not so well in the area of connecting and engaging the fathers. So each state is currently under a program improvement plan where they have to improve in certain areas. And NH is one of those; we're under a program improvement plan now. We're all creating mechanisms where we're engaging fathers more often, with children more in the DCYF system so that we're able to expedite permanency. The absent parent and the ability to locate an absent parent has hindered the agencies across the country to provide permanency to the kids in a timely fashion so each area, NH included, has made efforts to identify cases where we have an absent parent who may or may not be the father but in many cases is, and then our efforts to locate those fathers and bring them into the case, rather than counting them under currently missing and I don't know if that directly answers your question but that's...

GEANOULIS (CSM): I think the answer to the question might be that it would be very difficult to get data on the percent of your case load that is father-absent.

BISHOP (DHHS): It would be difficult to get that specific, if by father-absent you mean not on the birth certificate specifically or just not engaged in the case activity, there's different definitions of "absent" that we may be playing with across the different divisions as well.

GEANOULIS (CSM): Where the fathers are not engaged I guess would be a good starting point

BISHOP (DHHS): Yes. That's information we can gather.

GEANOULIS (CSM): Although I think it would be critical information to know what the birth certificate of the child looks like as well; would it be possible to get that data?

BISHOP (DHHS): It's easier for us to get the data at least within DCYF relative to the absent parent that we're trying to locate, yes. Relative to the details of the birth certificate, again that depends on our involvement with the case and where we are. If the child in foster care, we have access to a lot more information than if the child is in their own home with the other parent. So on some levels we can get some kind information, yes.

GEANOULIS (CSM): Could I ask for data that might give us some assistance on

getting a handle on this fatherless problem, whatever you could come up with?

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Would it be okay if Mr. Geanoulis contacted you directly? That way you can formulate some questions.

BISHOP (DHHS): Yes.

GEANOULIS (CSM): I'll take your email address.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): And one other thing on the agenda was I'd like to talk about some mechanism to either establish ongoing dialog or liaison between DHHS and this body.

STEPHEN (DHHS): I'd be very supportive of that.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): I don't know which, if you have a preferred method, like Michael and John are saying.

STEPHEN (DHHS): I will get to you. We have our public affairs director Greg Moore that Representative Bickford knows well and he's usually the point person with regard to any of the issues that the legislature or commissions bring to the Commission. And I would prefer it be that way so that if there's an issue with the Commission in my department that it comes directly to me, and if it goes to Greg I know it'll come directly to my office. The divisions obviously have all their own responsibilities and it may be an issue with Mental Health, may be an issue for Behavioral Health Division, and then I could make that decision when it comes to my desk. Rather than have another division say "well, it's not my area", probably want to go and then send it back. That's what I would like.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Also I think it would be helpful sometimes not for just problem-solving, but sometimes just as ongoing discussion.

STEPHEN (DHHS): I do that with the fathers' groups now that we meet with on a regular basis with John. I think that's been a very good dialog we've had, we've talked about some court issues trying to work out. I've actually met with Chief Justice Broderick. Maggie and I sit on a commission that's meeting with him on adoption issues. I've raised some of the issues that I've heard at meetings I've met with fathers group with the Chief Justice. Those types of dialogs I think are absolutely important. So yes, I would be very supportive.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): And I certainly think that a lot of the problems that people seem to have or groups seem to have is the whole communication problem, and it's easy for people to get off on tangents when they're not sort of able to say "what were you trying to say with that?" So I think that's certainly something that is very good, to officially report to DHHS and ourselves as a commission.

And Grace also, we've talked in the past, I think that there's no, we're all sort of on the same page somehow, same side, my feeling that it should be no men's or women's, it should be all just maybe a people's commission at times, so there've been times where we've said in the past at several different meetings, we've said this is something we really ought to, it would be nice to talk to the Coalition about or certainly talk to the people at the Commission on the Status of Women, and I think that any dialogs that we have about questions, like I said sometimes just asking that one question this morning probably circumvented God knows how many... someone tell someone tell someone and who knows how it ends up. So, sometimes it's just that they'll

call and say so if there's any way that we can establish a line of communication too? I think that would be in our, both, mutual interest.

STEPHEN (DHHS): A couple of things if I could just add, two things... the department is also actively involved with promoting parenthood initiatives and participated just this week in the seventh annual New England Fathering Conference which was held in Framingham, Mass. There's also some federal parenthood initiatives that favor both parents' participation that's also coming out of Washington, and that's something that we probably want to continue to have dialog on.

And I know in the Deficit Reduction Act there were two areas of that act recently that passed Congress that takes away the the states' ability to get TANF bonuses. We received over 30 million dollars in TANF bonuses in the past couple of years through our dedicated efforts here, in our staff. That bonus money is all being directed to 150 million dollars available to states - organizations actually - for promoting healthy marriages and shared parenting issues. So that's money that's not available to the State of NH. It was made clear to me last week when I met with ACF in Boston that that money is available for organizations, could be faith-based, and we're going to try to get the word out. The regulations will be released soon. That's 150 million dollars that's going to be available to states.

So there's a lot of things that we track and we try, so I think that continued dialog's important. And if you want to anything about those issues, just contact our department and I think Greg Moore would be the one the one who I'd want you to keep in touch with. And I can give you Greg's e-mail address: [gpmoore@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:gpmoore@dhhs.state.nh.us), and he'll make sure that whoever needs to get the information will get it. Okay?

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Thank you. Another quick question?

GEANOULIS (CSM): I have a question, yeah. I don't know if you're aware of this ad-hoc marriage committee that was meeting at the Health and Human Services Brown building. I was just wondering if they're still meeting, if you know, if those meetings are still going on?

WILLIAMS (DHHS): We can check into that... [???].

GEANOULIS (CSM): Yes, I think it's good to know more about that because they had a... well, I'll reserve my comments for later, just disturbed as regards to their philosophy of marriage.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Okay.

STEPHEN (DHHS): Thank you very much.

MASTROMARINO (CSM): Thank you very much.