**Minutes of Governor Deal’s Inaugural Child Welfare Reform Council Meeting at the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation**  **Office, May 1, 2014, 12:30 pm – 4:30 pm**

 Council Chair Stephanie Blank called the meeting to order at 12:35 pm and thanked everyone for attending. She introduced members of the Council and advised that the meetings will be taped and available to the public online. **(A copy of the overall taped proceedings of this meeting (as well as the proceedings of all future meetings) are and will be posted on the Governor Deal’s web page:** [**http://gov.georgia.gov/child-welfare-reform-council**](http://gov.georgia.gov/child-welfare-reform-council)

Council members attending included: Sen. Fran Miller, Tyra Walker, Judge Steve Teske, Donna Hyland, Dr. Cheryl Dozier, Ashley Willcott, Rep. Carolyn Hugley, Judge Peggy Walker, Rep. Wendell Willard, Heather Rowles, Sen. Freddie Powell Sims, Lamar Burkett, Rep. Valerie Clark, Meredith Ramaley, Crystal Williams, Valerie Condit, Melissa Carter, Duaine Hathaway, and Bob Bruder-Mattson. Additionally, Commissioner Keith Horton of the Department of Human Services, and Dr. Sharon Hill, Director of DFCS, were recognized, along with members of the Governor’s Staff, Erin Hames, Katie Rogers, and Ashley Aurandt. Two members of the Governor’s Communications Office were also present to film the entire proceedings of the meeting (Press Secretary Sasha Dlugolenski, and Communications Specialist Merry Hunter Hipp.)

In addition, there were more than 30 interested observers in attendance representing various child welfare organizations and public interests as well as members of the staff of DHS and DFCS. Council Chair Blank emphasized that the meetings and deliberations of the Child Welfare Reform Council will be entirely open to the public and transparent, and she expressed appreciation for the strong showing of interest in this initiative. Council Chair Blank shared with the group some of her background and experience serving children and why this work we’re talking about today is so important. She provided some overview of her thoughts about the child welfare system in Georgia and the important work getting underway with today’s meeting.

As she presented Governor Deal to the group, she commented about her respect and appreciation for his leadership, his commitment to children, and his use of data and science as the basis for formulating essential policy positions addressing the needs of children. She also praised First Lady Sandra Deal especially for the fact that Mrs. Deal had visited every county in Georgia to visit with and greet children.

 Governor Nathan Deal addressed the Council and expressed his appreciation for their willingness to serve and stressed the importance of their upcoming work. He commented that the Child Welfare Council is modeled after the Criminal Justice Reform Council due to the success of that council. He strongly emphasized that one of his biggest goals is to assure that children are able to grow up in a loving home; he said they deserve it, and our mission is to look for ways of helping to make sure they have that opportunity. He also commented that he believed the work of this Council will be one of the most important and successful endeavors of his term as Governor. He commented that everyone on the Child Welfare Council was asked to serve on this important mission because of their knowledge, experience and expertise, and he thanked them for accepting their assignment. He also thanked the members of the General Assembly for their help and support and told the group that funding was included in the FY 2015 budget to hire “hands and people” to look after children's well-being. He commented that 525 case workers in protective services will be added over 3 years and that he hopes that the council will take a comprehensive look at Georgia’s child welfare system and find where all needed improvements can be made. In summary, he stated that this Council will identify specific points where the State of Georgia can make improvements in how we look after our precious children and endeavor to assure that they experience nothing but the sorts of positive and nurturing lives they deserve. “I know it is not an easy task, because important efforts like this are rarely easy”, he said. He closed by asking the Council and the citizenry of Georgia to show patience and support for the many, dedicated and very hard working staff members serving Georgia’s children. The Governor acknowledged that the Council’s efforts will be to recommend steps for improving our statewide program that will clearly reflect the needed urgency and dedication required not only to help our staff do their jobs, but also for the State of Georgia to act proactively and with great dedication and commitment to the cause at hand that is so urgently needed.

` Council member Melissa Carter, Executive Director of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center at Emory University, provided a detailed overview of Georgia’s child protective services programs. (Copy posted on Governor Deal’s website.)

DHS Commissioner Keith Horton and DFCS Division Director Dr. Sharon Hill made a joint presentation to the Council that (1) explained basic information about the agency and its Vision, Mission and Core Values. Then, (2) a presentation was provided that detailed information about DFCS’ Current Workload, Strategies and Initiatives. (Copy posted on Governor Deal’s website.)

 During each of the power point presentations, the Council engaged in an extended series of questions and answers for the purpose of seeking clarity and common understanding of various issues and desires for clarification or additional information.

 Following the completion of the power point presentations, Council Chair Blank commented that the Child Welfare Reform Council was formed to bring vital outside expertise and fresh ideas to the table in an effort to work with the State of Georgia. She urged both the Council members and the guests/observers at the meeting to provide their input, suggestions, ideas, recommendations and thoughts on desired outcomes or new ways of doing business that would help structure upcoming meetings and deliberations of the Council work program. She emphasized that thoughts, suggestions and input would be taken via email at childwelfarereform@georgia.gov and that the Council would be looking carefully to find where there was the most opportunity to make necessary and essential changes. She closed her comments by reminding those present that “Good is the enemy of Great”, and that if there was even one (1) child in need of services and protection, that was too many. We should strive for the number to be zero children in need!

 She thanked those in attendance, and adjourned the meeting at 4:36 pm.

**These Presentations Are Posted on Governor Deal’s Website:**

* Melissa Carter Power Point Presentation: **THE STATE OF CHILD WELFARE IN** **GEORGIA: UNDERSTANDING THE OPPORTUNITIES**  **AND CHALLENGES**
* Keith Horton/Dr. Sharon Hill Power Point Presentations: **DHS AGENCY OVERVIEW** and **DFCS CURRENT WORKLOAD, STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES**