

October 19, 2022

Peggy Venable

Governor's Appointments Office
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Peggy,

It is with a heavy heart that I am writing this letter to make a formal complaint about the hostile environment at DFPS created by Luis Saenz, Sarah Hicks and Heather Flemings, the executive leadership in the Governor's Office, hereinafter "OOG". I have received hostile and disparate treatment from such staff. It is for that reason I am submitting this to you rather than to Luis. You have been supportive since the day I joined the team and I am truly appreciative.

I have been a loyal appointee of the state for almost three years. I have taken hits for people and departments that I haven't deserved to take. Staff from other departments have purposefully thrown myself and DFPS under the bus and watched me answer for issues that are theirs without speaking up. To keep the peace, I owned it all, but that loyalty meant nothing to the OOG and it hasn't helped our most vulnerable. DFPS is just one part of the child welfare system. I don't control behavioral health, mental health, licensing, juvenile justice, the courts and more but I have the children and DFPS feels the impact of every other system.

As an African American, Female, and citizen of The Cherokee Nation, I have struggled making this formal complaint because I do not wish to generate media coverage for Governor Abbott or myself but the conditions of my employment have only worsened. This past week, several employees came to me with various versions of the same story. In essence, each was told by my Chief of Staff (COS), that I will be fired come December and/or not confirmed during session. Several others, stated the rumor throughout the building is the same. I referred them to Human Resources, but most fear retaliation. It was then that I realized I can't even protect my staff, because of the dictates of the Governor's executive leadership, therefore, something must be done.

No job is perfect, but when I joined the team, I felt supported and was given the ability to run the department as I saw fit. I always had very limited contact with Luis, the Governor's Chief of Staff. Most of my communication was with the DFPS policy person, Elizabeth Farley, for the first two years. When Elizabeth left in November of 2021, things immediately changed but the environment was not hostile. Heather Flemings became the acting DFPS

policy person until a replacement could be found for Elizabeth. Numerous people told me Heather would not be supportive of DFPS if there was a difference of opinion between DFPS and HHSC and unfortunately, that proved to be true on many occasions, but it wasn't limited to Heather. Luis, Sarah and Angela Colmenero, the OOG Council often dismissed DFPS' recommendations and/or requests surrounding the lawsuit even though we carry the bulk of the remedial orders and my Deputy Commissioner is a talented litigator and has already led a child welfare department through similar litigation.

In the fall of 2021, DFPS COS resigned and I was on the search for a new one. In early December, Sarah Hicks called to advise me of a candidate that she thought would be a great fit for my COS position. Julie Frank was that person and she and I met prior to a formal interview. Julie was energetic and talked about all of her legislative connections and how that would help me. One concern I had from this initial meeting was she volunteered that she knew I was friends with a particular person and knew that he was part of the team that hired me. She went on to explain that she and this person used to be friends but she has lost that friend and is under a Non-Disclosure Agreement and couldn't elaborate. I thought this was odd, since I didn't ask, and she didn't even know me or have any idea what kind of relationship, if any, that I had with this person. Julie was surprisingly loud and boisterous, which was a bit distracting. Nonetheless, it was not a reason not to hire her given the OOG's recommendation and she had extensive legislative connections. Luis reached out to me to say, he was aware of my meeting with Julie and he wanted to assure me, Julie would be "my person" and that I "can trust her."

Julie joined DFPS in late December and staff were a little anxious. Knowing she was strongly recommended by the OOG, executive staff felt they could no longer talk openly during our meetings. I assured staff that was addressed during Julie's interview and she understood why the team would feel that way but she understands she *works* for me and that is where her loyalty lies and that she is not here to just report back to the OOG about what's going on. I was very pleased with how the first couple of weeks had gone. Julie jumped in with both feet and was a help to me right away. I even sent a message to Sarah and Luis to state that.

Bizarre is the only way I can describe the shift in behavior from Julie. One day she is happy, laughing and talking loud enough for the whole floor to hear, and then the next she is emotional and not speaking to me, the next she is crying and texting furiously with the OOG and the next she is all business again. One thing that has been consistent with Julie is her animated outbursts in staff meetings when I or anyone disagrees with her recommendation on how we should proceed.

After the January 11, 2022 foster-care lawsuit hearing, I returned to the office and my executive assistant stated, I have worked in law enforcement for years and never have I needed to take out my rosary at the office until today. She stated something happened during the hearing with Judge Jack and Julie yelled the "C" word from her office. She stated all the executive support staff who were present were shocked. Thereafter, another staff reported Julie was telling them about "her hole", when one male looked at her curiously, she motioned around her midsection and stated, this hole and then grabbed her crotch and stated "not this hole." But for the fact she was recommended by the OOG and has close personal friendships with Sarah and Luis, I would have immediately addressed such behavior.

Late January, 2022 Julie came into my office with a very sad affect and stated she was so upset to tell me that, "the OOG is not going to support you like you need them to." She then started crying and continued talking. I couldn't follow what she was saying as I was caught off guard by her emotional state and the crying. I was concerned with how the behavior was inappropriate and didn't fit the message. I didn't tell her that's been the case since Elizabeth left, as I and the department have always been treated differently than HHSC.

On February 25th, 2022, Julie, the Deputy Commissioner, the Human Resources Director and I were gathered in the conference room to conduct interviews. Julie presented a draft letter to me that Heather wanted me to send to the Governor. This would have been a second letter on a subject I already had sent acknowledging the Governor's direction. I thought that sending the letter would only result in unwanted negative press for the Governor, DFPS and me. I also thought it could further negatively impact the current CWOP crisis by hindering communications with people and organizations we need to help with some of our most vulnerable foster children. I told Julie, I would reach out to Luis to discuss but if the directive from him was to send, then I would. She folded the draft, slammed it in her notebook and began texting. Throughout the interviews, she remained distracted and teary eyed, continuously putting the phone down, picking it up, texting more, pulling out the document, putting it back and shifting in her seat. This unprofessional behavior was so distracting and bizarre that one of the interviewees contacted DFPS afterwards to see if Julie was okay.

Before going to talk with Luis, Julie came in my office with tears in her eyes but not crying and stated, "if you go to Luis asking questions, they won't want you working here anymore." I told Julie, as Commissioner I have to be able to talk with the Governor's leadership when I believe it is necessary. I met with Luis and stated, "I will do what I am directed to do but thought there were a few things you may want to consider." Luis responded as if he wasn't aware of the request and refused to look at the draft letter that I had been provided by Julie.

He stated, "I don't want to see it." I wasn't sure what to make of his response. He proceeded by asking that we hold off and revisit the issue next week.

I followed up with Julie because I felt her actions in the interview were concerning and unprofessional. She responded that "Heather and Sarah were 'yelling' at me about where is the letter and I didn't know what to tell them." I asked her why neither called me and she responded that "they put me here to talk with them and that they no longer expect to talk to you." She further stated, "Sarah and Heather view you as the problem child and no longer believe you have the skills to run the department."

Julie's bizarre behavior, and her constant consultation with Heather on items that DFPS was just discussing and that I hadn't requested her to take to the OOG, led to a shift in our executive team meetings. Staff became very guarded and began coming to my office to update me on things rather than talking in front of Julie. Prior to Julie joining the team, staff were free to have spirited conversations. It was understood to be a safe place for discussion and debate but once I made the final decision, everyone understood the direction.

I have been told that Julie stated, the OOG sent her to fix the department and when Sarah called her and mentioned DFPS, she said "don't hang up." Julie stated Luis was "pissed" when I went to see him, and stated that had he fired me earlier, the information about "The Refuge" being publicly released would never have happened. Julie stated Luis was concerned about what to do because he was in pictures with Refuge leadership. Further, Julie was in agreement with the course of action taken and as COS she should have reached out to legislative members to brief them. I no longer rely on Julie and have personally notified members of high-profile cases. Nonetheless, Julie has repeatedly stated to me and others that I need to understand I'm not in Kansas anymore and I can't just talk to Luis when I want, he has other issues more important.

Another story Julie has repeatedly shared is the alleged loss of her best friend, in the Lt. Governor's office because she chose to work for me. I struggle to believe that. Julie stated that "but for" Sarah asking her to, she would never have chosen to work for DFPS.

In March, 2022, three months after her arrival, DFPS extended an offer to a candidate for CFO. We were all excited that the candidate had accepted. A few days later the candidate withdrew her acceptance. Julie didn't really know the candidate and the vacancy didn't impact her day-to-day duties but once again, she inappropriately was in tears as she discussed her disappointment. Julie surmised to staff that the candidate must have learned of the Commissioner's incompetency.

In May, 2022, staff asked if I knew Julie was searching for an office in DFPS for Heather and I said "no." I learned that Julie was arranging for Heather to move into a DFPS office to

monitor what is going on. Julie also scheduled a meeting with my staff for Heather, without an invite to me, so Heather could question them about CWOP. It appeared; Julie had led Heather to believe that she could not trust my word. My staff reported to me what was shared and it was a reiteration of what I had already reported to the OOG.

When I was hired, I was advised Governor Abbott wanted a change. The Governor didn't want the department to run the way it had been. There was a culture that was resistant to change and stuck with the status quo. A culture of being busy with the politics and the administration rather than a laser focus on the children, families and caseworkers. Further, the staff appeared to be able to resist the change by slow rolling any legislative directives, knowing that every two to three years another Commissioner is appointed. I met with legislative members who expressed their distrust for the department, in general, and certain people specifically who tended to be the institutionalist. Against this backdrop, when I arrived, I advised my executive staff that I would not be handled and I am not a puppet. I would talk with staff, providers, families, etc. myself, so I would understand the true picture rather than having it filtered through staff. This wasn't received well as right away when I asked which legislative member was most annoyed with us and stated that would be one of my first meetings, my then SR director called the OOG to try to stop me! I was shocked by that and could see why we had issues. My leadership style and the tasks the Governor assigned to me meant that some of the Governor's executive staff, were going to have to hear me talk about state employees that were their friends. Apparently, they were not ready for a change and told me I should not be so involved with staff and that I should not meet with legislators alone.

When Julie arrived, she further communicated this sentiment of no change. Julie told me and the Deputy Commissioner that the OOG was concerned about me getting rid of all the institutional knowledge and that Trevor had complained to the OOG that he just couldn't take it. She stated the OOG wanted me to be a figurehead, not involved in the day-to-day operations. I am not a passive leader and couldn't be if I tried. This job is too important for me to take a hands-off approach, especially given the shape things were in when I arrived. Staff were still fighting compliance with the Remedial Orders in the Foster Care Litigation. Although the Legislature has spoken that the State is moving to CBC, no plans were made for what the roll-out meant for CPS, much less for the support areas such as data, IT and cybersecurity. Moreover, everyone expects me to be able to answer any question they have about everything and everyone's job at DFPS, unlike any other commissioner that I am aware of and yet it was strongly encouraged that I disengage!

I tried being responsive to the "figurehead" comment and cleared my calendar where I could to spend more time at public events such as the speaking at the Assemblies of God

Foster Care Conference, attending the Community Based Care Conference and various other public events.

Additionally, when Julie arrived, she began disseminating rumors about me. "Heather believes you are paranoid" and "you have created an environment of fear within the ranks of the executive team." Upon hearing this, I contacted the HR Director, Mathis Hale, to request a management review of me. I am not above reproach; if such an environment existed, I wanted to know so it could be addressed. I told the HR Director what I heard and thought I had a relationship with the executive team that they would tell me if they felt that way but maybe I was wrong. He agreed to perform a review. I contacted my team to advise them I had requested a management review, it would be confidential and I would not know who said what, and encouraged them to please respond honestly. My staff were confused and stated it wasn't necessary but I told them it was and I needed to know. The review was conducted on April 7th and 8th of 2022. The results of the management review did not reveal an environment of fear or substantiate any of Julie's statements. The review is attached.

My anxiety, lack of trust and non-confidence with Julie had reached the point to release her from her job. Though concerned, Luis and Sarah would not believe me, I decided I needed to talk with them before acting. I had confided in a confidant, Anne Heiligenstein and she was shocked. She stated, "surely you can't be expected to deal with that. You have to talk with Luis." I was very nervous as Julie made it clear how close she is to everyone in the OOG, Lt. Governor's office and numerous members and their staff. Still, I agreed with Anne and thought surely as Commissioner, I wouldn't be expected to keep someone with these kinds of behaviors. Therefore, after one of our bi-weekly OOG meetings in late March or early April, I asked Sarah for a moment after the meeting and explained I needed to meet with her and Luis to discuss Julie. I stated Julie's behavior has become very bizarre in the office and she wasn't going to work out as my COS. I gave her a couple of examples. I told Sarah that Julie had shared that Luis was "pissed" that I had come to talk with him regarding the second letter discussed prior, and Sarah acknowledged he was upset. I also said Julie advised that "I am no longer to talk with you guys, you had hired her to communicate with them on behalf of DFPS," and she responded, "that isn't exactly the case." Sarah said she would find a time for us to meet.

Sometime in April, I am not sure of the date. I met with Sarah and Luis. I stated, "to avoid this becoming news," I requested staff not to send the concerns about Julie electronically and that I would handle it. I stated I have documents with me and stated Julie has shared information about all of you, the Governor, Lt. Governor, Legislators and more. I stated I am sure you don't want me or others knowing the information she has shared, including that had he fired me earlier, the refuge situation would have never happened. Luis and Sarah

both declined to look at the staff notes I had brought and to date, still don't know the numerous statements Julie has made. I also stated staff are very concerned about Julie's wellbeing and are worried she has a drinking problem because of the mood changes and because she tells them about her drinking. Luis stated Heather is an angel, that Julie was his friend and he was also friends with her husband. He stated Julie would continue to work at the department and if not, he would bring her to the OOG and put her over something for DFPS. I took that as a threat. Luis also stated that if he wanted to fire me, he would call me and ask me to meet him at a coffee shop and tell me this isn't working out. After the meeting, Julie informed the Deputy Commissioner that Luis called to tell her everything I said and that I had made a big mistake. Julie stated, "Luis said I wasn't going anywhere."

The behaviors continued although Julie tried to be more controlled. In early May, after the Senate Special Committee hearing, Sarah asked to meet. When I arrived, she escorted me to Luis' office where he, Heather and Angela were waiting. I don't recall how the meeting started as I was a bit nervous. At some point I brought up Julie and Luis asked what was happening? I explained I thought it was inappropriate for Julie to spend her days texting and calling Heather to report every move I made and I can't deal with her roller-coaster moods of speaking one day and the next acting as if she detests me. He cut me off and said, "that sounds like a COS to me" and chuckled. He then switched gears and asked what happened at the hearing on the 4th. I said it was fine. He said he heard members were very upset with me. I stated the conversation was spirited at times but I have texts to show we are working together. He never asked to see it and continued. It was clear that seed had been purposefully planted and it was being purposefully believed. He stated he didn't see the hearing but he was told that members were very angry and he did not want to have another hearing like that. I learned at that meeting they were assigning me another executive team member, former Commissioner Anne Heiligenstein, to be Executive Deputy Commissioner, and she would be with me through May of 2023. Luis stated "Anne will be above all of my staff and will have all the authority that comes with that position!" I found this interesting since based on the OOG's treatment and micromanagement of me, as the DPFS Commissioner, I wasn't sure I had all the authority and autonomy, delegated to me by law, so what exactly did he mean? Luis also stated this was for my success. I believe he needed to say that since his general counsel was in the room. For last two years I have been telling the OOG what I need for success and all of those items directly support children, vulnerable adults and caseworkers. An additional executive member wasn't one of them and if I needed one, I have the authority to create it without approval. This was also doubtful since their friend Julie, stated Luis has wanted to fire me since before the Refuge and stated they have been discussing for some time.

I was embarrassed and humiliated and felt this had been done intentionally to push me to the point of quitting. My conviction was cemented when in the newspaper announcement for Anne joining DFPS, it stated the OOG had advised that it had received complaints from members, concerned about my ability to lead the department! This was never said in my meeting with them! Moreover, I had members calling to ask if this was a good thing, others calling to ask if the spirited conversation caused this and still others who were aware of the comments, telling me they never called the OOG about my leadership. I still have stakeholders come up to me as recently as October 14th to say I should not trust any suggestion that this was at the initiation of the OOG but should assume Anne initiated the contact with them and to be careful. I tend to believe this as Julie stated, she was never asked about Anne prior to her joining DFPS. Further, I found Judge Coley's comment that the agency had not been run well since Anne, offensive to me and every commissioner that came after her. He has never sat in this seat.

Anne's arrival and assumption of the newly created position of "Executive Deputy Commissioner," created so much chaos in the State office. Many who were there during Anne's tenor were discussing how she left DFPS and were shocked the OOG chose to bring her back. Staff believe I am going to be fired and that Anne will be the next Commissioner. They were confused about who they report to and who could give them directives. When she first arrived and people were deeply concerned, I told everyone that it was okay; that Anne was my friend and while I thought this was meant to hurt me by the OOG, I was thankful it was someone I knew and not someone like the first referral. Anne, is someone I have known since my time in Kansas; a confidant since coming to Texas. Anne stated she really struggled to do this and felt awful she couldn't tell Corliss Lawson, Deputy Commissioner and Veli Kozakoujehian, General Counsel, as they were all at a Casey Family Programs event when this was being discussed with me. I told Anne don't feel weird. We are good and I trust you. Despite what everyone was saying to me, I had to believe that was true or I don't know how I would have kept going.

Since I considered Anne a close friend, she knew of the challenges I was having with Julie. Anne told me to have Julie assigned to her and she would keep her in check. She stressed to me that the OOG told her Julie is untouchable but that she would diminish her impact on the agency. Julie ultimately complained to the OOG and I received a call from Madi, OOG policy staff stating Julie should be a direct report to me and asked if I was communicating with her as COS. I removed HR from under Julie due to her struggles with confidentiality, the inappropriate behaviors I observed and the numerous complaints from staff.

I later learned that Anne told others, Luis told her, she could do what she wants and if Jaime didn't like it, she could quit. He asked Anne if she would stay if I quit and she said, "yes." Also unbeknownst to me, Anne started using Casey funds to utilize a retired DFPS staff and

other existing Casey contractors to work on various legislative initiatives and responses within the agency. Staff begin coming to me to ask why were all the "old guard coming back?" Anne had extended Casey contracts to several retired staff and even one staff I removed from the department! I learned of one task given to a consultant was to reorganize CPS. This caused a bit of anxiety by staff because this was a former executive member being brought back as a consultant and they feared the outcome. Despite the directive given to me, OOG staff started asking via Julie, "who was running the agency" as Anne managed to upset Julie as well and she complained to the OOG. Legal has had to remind Anne of the terms of her contract as she became embroiled in personnel issues and tried to dictate which staff should be promoted. I met with Anne, and told her, I need to approve any consultants she brings on and I need to understand what they are doing to ensure it is allowed under the current Casey agreement. I also told her the consultants she brought on to determine how CPS would be structured needed to go. It is inappropriate to task an outside agency with that without consulting me. I advised bringing back all these previous employees is causing concern with staff and it is undoing the changes I have made in response to legislative concerns, foster-care litigation and the direction child welfare is going. More specifically, my GC had raised the flag numerous times, as Anne is not a DFPS employee but a consultant on loan from Casey Family Programs, and therefore, she should not be a spokesperson on behalf of DFPS. The Casey attorney stated under no circumstances, can Anne be involved in personnel, lobbying or other areas outside of the agreement. Knowing what happened when I talked with the OOG about Julie, I hoped Anne would fall back in line with the terms of the contract. When Anne became involved with legislation things changed a little. Her involvement upset Julie who went to the OOG to state Anne was getting in her lane and running DFPS with a bunch of consultants from a "liberal agency rather than the Commissioner running DFPS." Only then did I have a meeting with our new policy person, Madi, to state I had talked with Anne and advised that I needed to approve all consultants and I instructed her to end the agreements she had entered into on behalf of DFPS for some. Anne has full authority until she crosses Julie and then the OOG responds.

Things appeared to be okay until Julie was out of the office for an extended weekend. My GR staff had scheduled a meeting with two members of the legislature, which I did not find out about until the day before. Anne was scheduled to attend as the representative for DFPS rather than me. I was concerned that such a decision had been made without consulting me. My deputy commissioner was also excluded and is often excluded from meetings. I had a conflict for the first, so Anne attended, but I was hoping to return as soon as I could to join as it was a Teams meeting. When I returned to the office, the meeting was wrapping up and it was clear the legislative member was frustrated with the information Anne shared. It appeared Anne was doubling down, so when the legislative member

interrupted with his position Corliss and I both responded in agreement. As I began to debrief with Anne and the Deputy Commissioner, who also was not invited but decided to sit in, the legislator text me to say he would be calling in five minutes. He stated, he's not stupid and wasn't buying the rationale given. I told him I agreed with him and provided a bit of detail. That evening I briefed Julie who was out of town but still working. The next day, Madi, called Anne and I together and was very firm in her tone, wanting to know why we had not let her know that a member was angry with us and that she can't do her job if not kept in the loop. Her tone and words seemed rehearsed. I explained I only attended the last 5 minutes and that the member called me frustrated but he was not angry with me. I don't know of any way to say it other than it felt like a trap. She framed it as though the member was angry with me; to the contrary, he was frustrated by the explanation Anne had given him about what had been presented. An explanation that wasn't ours to give and should have been left to HHSC to address. It was clear like the hearing, that Julie had purposefully misrepresented what happened and there was no changing the perception.

The situation has grown worse since then. On September 29th, I held interviews with the Executive Team for CPI Associate Commissioner. The consensus of the team was the best and most qualified candidate was the former CPI Associate Commissioner. Julie was livid and stated she didn't like his communication style and couldn't imagine putting him before the legislature. Anne was lurking in the hall, waiting for me when we finished, and followed me to my car to find out how the interviews had gone. As she is not supposed to be involved with personnel decisions, I simply stated the team didn't feel her candidate was ready and I had to recent examples that strongly supported that. She responded "but I haven't heard good things about him." Anne had been advocating for an existing employee to advance to the Associate Commissioner role.

When I arrived in the office on October 3rd, Julie caught me in the hallway and said she had some good news and some bad news as she had been doing some checking around on the former CPI Associate Commissioner. It is obvious she is empowered to what she pleases. Jim is a known factor. I never asked her to check. The bad news was Heather told her the former Commissioner Wittman would not allow the former CPI Associate Commissioner to testify for fear of embarrassment. I told Julie, he is not a stranger to me and has testified before and we decide as team who is appropriate to testify. The good news was she said she was unable to find anything else.

On October 1st, the acting CPI Associate Commissioner sent an email stating Anne directed her to send her the plan for providing incentive raises to address CPI turnover and that she would take it from there and deal with finance. This is a task I told the acting CPI Associate Commissioner and the Regional Directors to do. Anne took it upon herself to brief Madi in the OOG before fully briefing me! I convened a meeting on October 3rd. There I learned the

policy for referrals to Family Based Safety Services ("FBSS") had changed and a new policy was being sent to the field that day. I also did not learn until I convened a meeting that Anne was not invited to but Julie invited her, regarding the same, that the Director for FBSS had been reassigned. Anne was fully aware of the changes as well as the details of each. A week prior, Anne had mentioned asking for an incentive bonus for CPI and I told her, "I will not approve to the exclusion of CPS simply because its turnover was not as high. It would be a slap in the face, and it would surely cause a surge in staff resigning. She pushed back and I said it is not an option! Include CPS or it's a no go. CPI is overwhelmed with the job they signed up for and CPS is overwhelmed with a task they did not. Both are in crisis." During the meeting, the plan presented did not include CPS despite what I previously had stated. I was frustrated and upset and reiterated CPS must be included due to CWOP. Somehow Julie became upset and highly animated over words and felt the need to tell me what I meant and didn't mean when I said CPS vs CWOP. She also proceeded to tell me what my decision was to make and what and how she needed to discuss it with the OOG and ledge. I advised that all of the items as part of the presented plan to address the CPI crisis, minus the incentive bonus, were approved and further directed that Lea Ann and Julie go back and get the number for CPS. I left the meeting before tempers escalated any further.

On the evening of October 3rd, I received a call from Madi stating Julie and Anne advised her there were two candidates for the CPI Associate Commissioner. I told her I already offered the job. She replied that she needed to check with Sarah and Angela and call me back. I told her, outside of COS and GR Director, I have never had to get approval from the OOG to hire, especially when normal processes are followed. My decision to not promote was based on the candidate's performance while acting. It has been a notification only and not prior to me offering. I told her it was inappropriate for my COS and Anne to go behind my back to attempt to block a hire without proper justification and wrong for the OOG to allow it. Madi stated she is new and still learning how this should work. I was so upset. At that point, I felt so defeated and totally depleted of my authority to do the job I was hired to do. I am certain no other commissioner has chains on them like I do or do other commissioners suffer this disparate treatment? What is more important is caring for our most vulnerable! Why would the OOG, Julie, or Anne make this job harder than it already is?

On October 4th, I received a text from Julie, stating the documents I approved and directed to be sent to Chair Frank and Senator Perry would not be sent. Julie stated Sarah told her to call Chair Frank and tell him so. She stated Sarah needed to review and approve it. This was information I had publicly agreed to provide to help with our current CWOP population. I had understood those documents to have been submitted months earlier only to find out Julie and the GR team were still holding them. This text came after I realized they hadn't been sent and directed it to be done.

On October 4th, my office manager called to say she and one other executive assistant in the office were very uncomfortable with Julie. She stated spectrum news was on and there was a story on but couldn't remember who they were talking about. She stated Julie came out of her office looked at the television and stated our loud, that guy is a "dick" and went back in her office. A short while later she came back out and looked at the screen and again stated, that guy is a "dick" too. I met with both assistants when I returned to the office and I apologized I hadn't done anything to stop this behavior as this was not the first complaint. This time, I told them to consider going to HR with all the concerns they brought to my attention. HR Director interviewed both and they confirmed what was said by the COS.

On October 11, I contacted Anne and stated I felt betrayed that she would go around me to stop me from hiring the former CPI Associate Commissioner. She responded, "but you hired him." I stated to her, "you would not have tolerated this when you were commissioner." The only thing she could offer was, "you hired him." I also told her I was very concerned that I wasn't notified of a major personnel and policy changes for FBSS, as noted above, for an area that has significant ledge focus. She stated, "as Commissioner, I wouldn't have needed to know those details and I am sure I was thinking like that and that's my mistake." It should be noted that the Deputy Commissioner also was unaware of the changes. Anne went on to try to justify why the employees needed to be reassigned and that she understood I told Erica she could run the division. However, this is involvement in personnel decision. I stated, it has nothing to do with running the division. I am sitting in the meeting wondering why the director is not here and only after asking my assistant numerous times to try to reach her did you speak up and say she isn't over it any longer. My concern is not being notified, not controlling the decision. She again repeated the same words. At that point, it seemed her responses were calculated and intentional for a reason larger than the call. At the time, I thought she was trying to protect Casey by not admitting that she was acting outside the scope of the Contract. I finally stated, I don't think you are hearing me so let' just end the conversation.

On October 12th, an employee stopped in my office and stated, Julie told her and several others I and my team would all be fired in December. She stated Julie said, she is feeling better that Madi is finally coming along in agreeing with her. The employee stated she is worried about their GR Director because he does everything for Julie. She stated Julie is so concerned about her reputation that she stresses them all out by spending so much time on the most minor issues. She also advised that Julie has made numerous comments about older people that have made her uncomfortable. She complimented my leadership and stated she doesn't know how I am hanging on with all that I am up against. I advised that I think she should go to HR. I told her I understand if you are fearful of retaliation, but I

needed to at least give her that advice. As I have done before and would do in any other similar situation.

After hearing all that and dealing with what I have, I went to see the HR Director to express my concerns about being in a hostile work environment and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as I've never used it before but the treatment, I have received from the OOG, Julie and now Anne are impacting my ability to do my job and my physical wellbeing. I am a strong person, but I am only human and have limitations on how much I can take. Of equal import, several of my staff have advised that the environment has become toxic and hostile due to these outside influences and is impacting their ability to their job and their physical wellbeing.

I am deeply impacted by the loss of my friendship with Anne but I kind of get it. There is no way you could bring me back and expect me not to try to take over but I would never have accepted the position because I would have understood how it would make the current Commissioner feel.

October 18th, 2022 Julie told staff that Madi in the OOG shared personal information about one of my executive members with her and Anne. Neither of them has a business reason to know that information and I made it clear when I shared it with Madi that those who need to know have been notified. Julie also openly shared that she heard I was going to sue her and fire her while she was on vacation. She stated she would sue me for stating she is unfit. She further stated the last straw for Madi was when I didn't get her approval before hiring Jim Sylvester.

The environment has really affected my state of mind, physical health and ability to lead this department as well as the wellbeing of the executive team members and others in State office who were excited about our mission and being part of my administration.

I remain committed to this role and the charge the Governor gave to me to protect our most vulnerable and change the culture at DFPS. I feel certain the Governor has not been briefed on the issues described herein but I fear it is a matter of time as the tension and aggression is overwhelming. I want to be treated like every other commissioner and department head who is allowed to lead with the authority and autonomy that comes with the position and without executive staff and subordinates dictating to me how I will run the agency. I don't mean to suggest that I will not comply with directives from the Governor on overarching issues important to his administration.

I am filing this formal complaint in support of my decision to terminate Julie Frank. I further conclude, as her supervisor, she is unfit to serve as COS or any role with or for DFPS as she has impugned my character and contributed to a toxic and hostile workplace. She has

stated she is good friends with the Lt. Governor's new Deputy Chief of Staff, who told her the Senate is not going to confirm me this summer and that the OOG has been discussing getting rid of me for some time and it will be done before the session begins. Additionally, Julie should not work in a supervisory role. She struggles to control her anger, she takes any disagreement personal, she often perceives situations completely different than everyone else in the room, she cannot resist talking about information that should not be shared, especially with subordinates, she struggles to read the room and is often too loud. She also has a strong desire to feel important and be validated.

I have already contacted Anne's supervisor at Casey Family Programs, and he stated this is not how this should work. He offered to talk with Anne, but I stated I would do it and follow up. I also intend to reach out again to state I will be submitting the 30-day notice to terminate the contract. My preference is to avoid any publicity, litigation or further disruptions to DFPS staff.

I understand I should be able to report this directly to Luis Saenz, but I fear retaliation due to the response I received when I tried to address this before. My attempts to address this professionally and privately was met with threats and hostility. The rope around my neck just gets tighter. Since Luis and the other staff are clearly compromised due to their relationship with Julie, they cannot be objective in responding to this claim.

I anticipate your response.

Warm regards,



Jaime Masters

DFPS COMMISSIONER

CC: DFPS HR

Investigation Report

Background:

On October 20, 2022, I was assigned as the Investigating Complaint Officer within the Office of the Governor (OOG) to investigate a complaint filed by Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Commissioner Jaime Masters.

Initial Complaint:

The written complaint, comprising a 14-page letter signed by Commissioner Masters and a 6-page attachment, was personally delivered on October 19, 2022 to Peggy Venable, OOG's Director of Appointments.

Commissioner Masters's primary complaint is that she has been subjected to a hostile work environment. The Commissioner makes numerous allegations in her complaint against her Chief of Staff, Julie Frank, as well as her Executive Deputy Commissioner, Anne Heiligenstein. The Commissioner asserts that the OOG is responsible for these staff assignments, and thus for the resulting hostile work environment that she perceives at DFPS.

The Commissioner also complains that she has received hostile and disparate treatment from Luis Saenz, Sarah Hicks, and Heather Fleming of the OOG. The Commissioner does not specifically allege any such treatment but does insinuate that the basis for such treatment stems from "dictates of the Governor's executive leadership" and threats that she will lose her appointment as Commissioner. The Commissioner also mentions that she is an "African American, Female, and citizen of The Cherokee Nation" and insinuates that this somehow resulted in disparate treatment.

The Commissioner's complaint is centered on the premise that the OOG was overly involved in the management of DFPS, thereby eliminating her autonomy and decision-making authority. Specifically, the Commissioner mentions that, as it pertains to the foster-care litigation, recommendations and requests from her office were often dismissed. She further alleges that other agencies were favored over DFPS, namely the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). The Commissioner also asserts that OOG staff circulated rumors throughout her agency that the OOG had lost faith in her abilities. Further, the Commissioner states that she was required to make certain personnel decisions based on OOG recommendations and involvement.

Subsequent Action:

On Thursday, October 20, 2022, I met with the General Counsel of OOG to discuss the initial complaint and develop a plan of action. This Investigation Report is being submitted on October 28, 2022, thereby completing my assignment as the Investigating Complaint Officer.

Interviews:

1. During the period of October 21, 2022 to October 27, 2022, I conducted interviews with the following OOG staff members: Sarah Hicks, Director of Budget and Policy; Angela Colmenero,

Principal Deputy General Counsel; Luis Saenz, Chief of Staff; Peggy Venable, Director of Appointments; and Madi Fletcher, Budget and Policy Advisor. I also interviewed Heather Fleming, a former Budget and Policy Advisor with OOG.

2. All persons interviewed were informed that I was conducting an investigation regarding a complaint against OOG staff. I stated that my goal was to gather facts, and that they could assist by answering my questions thoroughly and honestly. I requested that the conversation (and knowledge of the investigation) be kept confidential. Finally, I emphasized that OOG policy prohibits retaliation and asked them to inform me immediately if they encounter any problems in relation to their interviews.

3. On October 21, 2022, I interviewed Sarah Hicks. Sarah acknowledged that the Commissioner began her role with good ideas and was encouraged to bring her own people to assist her in running the agency. However, since the Commissioner was not from Texas, neither she nor the staff she brought were familiar with Texas government. During the Commissioner's tenure, DFPS's Chief of Staff position became available, and a conversation arose between Sarah and the Commissioner about needing someone for the role. Sarah approached Julie Frank, a former OOG employee, about the position and thought Julie would be a good candidate because she has a good reputation with the Texas Legislature and is familiar with Texas government. Sarah introduced Julie to the Commissioner as a prospective employee. Julie was ultimately hired by the Commissioner for the Chief of Staff position. According to Sarah, at no time prior to hiring Julie did the Commissioner express concern about Julie's fitness for the position.

After some time, the Commissioner did approach Sarah with concerns about Julie, but Sarah denies providing any feedback or response. During our interview, Sarah acknowledged that employment and termination decisions are left to the agency, and she did not insert herself into those conversations within DFPS. Sarah was also approached by Julie, who expressed frustration with the Commissioner not listening to her or heeding her advice. Sarah informed Julie that her work was appreciated and to "hang in there," but offered no further input on the matter.

Sarah stated that the Commissioner also complained that issues involving children without placement (CWOP) were taking up too much of her time. During a springtime meeting with the Commissioner and others that Sarah attended, it was suggested that Anne Heiligenstein be brought in to assist with these CWOP issues. Sarah understood the Commissioner to be on board with this idea, even excited, as Anne was someone she already consulted. Sarah does not recall the Commissioner expressing any concerns at this meeting.

Sarah stated that she has never witnessed an OOG employee comment negatively on the Commissioner's job performance to anyone outside of OOG. Sarah stated that members of the Legislature expressed concern over the Commissioner and her ability to lead the agency. Both the Chairs of the House's Human Services Committee and of the Senate's Health and Human Services Committee met with OOG staff to address these concerns. During those meetings, Sarah asserts that she and Luis Saenz defended the Commissioner and requested time and patience for the Commissioner "to implement her vision." Sarah did take part in a meeting with

the Commissioner to address her communications with the Legislature. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure that the Commissioner was properly sharing information with the Legislature, and at no point was the Commissioner directed on how or when meetings with members could occur.

Sarah further elaborated that she has never witnessed any inappropriate or discriminatory comments made about the Commissioner in any context or setting. She acknowledged that while the nature of the work of DFPS produces difficult conversations, they are always kept professional. She commented that transparency is expected of all agencies within the executive branch, and that DFPS is sometimes reluctant to share information. Sarah does not perceive that DFPS or Commissioner Masters has been treated differently than any other agency. Sarah asserts that the OOG has gone “out of their way to help and advocate for her.”

4. On October 21, 2022, I interviewed Angela Colmenero. Angela asserts that her contacts with Commissioner Masters, Julie Frank, and Anne Heiligenstein have all been in a professional setting. Angela describes her involvement with these matters to be limited to assistance with the contract for Anne’s position with DFPS and representation of the OOG in the foster-care litigation. Angela acknowledged that DFPS has had difficult challenges that require OOG attention, but she has not been witness to any unusual interactions. She asserts that meetings she has attended have been “incredibly professional,” and she has never seen hostile or discriminatory conduct.

Angela acknowledged that Commissioner Masters has a poor reputation among the Legislature. In particular, she personally witnessed a House member refer to the Commissioner as “all talk, no action.” Angela recalled that at a meeting with Luis, Sarah, Heather, and Commissioner Masters in late April 2022, the Commissioner complained of being unable to find help, and stated that she couldn’t do her job alone. Luis informed the Commissioner of a plan to bring in Anne. Angela described the Commissioner’s reaction as excited and incredibly thankful. Angela asserts that she was unaware of any subsequent rifts in the employment relationship between Julie, Anne, and Commissioner Masters, and that she does not know whether any opinions were provided by OOG staff on the matter.

Angela mentioned that there were regular interagency meetings concerning the foster-care litigation. She mentioned that DFPS and HHSC wanted to approach the litigation differently, which led to frustrations among the two agencies. Angela described how any decisions regarding the lawsuit were mediated by attorneys from the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and were made in the best interest of Texas, without bias toward any agency or its employees. She further emphasized that the OOG had no part in making these determinations and was merely present as a party to the lawsuit.

Angela stated that she has never witnessed the OOG insert itself into employment decisions within an agency. She elaborated that while the OOG may be informed of such matters, it is out of courtesy and the OOG does not dictate the status of any agency’s employee. She also referenced that Commissioner Masters has terminated a high-level employee at DFPS who was respected by the OOG, yet the OOG did not involve itself in the decision.

Angela further described that the OOG has gone “above and beyond” to get DFPS and Commissioner Masters needed resources, including the services of Julie and Anne.

5. On October 21, 2022, I interviewed Heather Fleming. Heather explained that she served as OOG’s interim policy advisor for DFPS beginning in late 2021. She described that while there have been difficult conversations at times, they have never been unprofessional. Heather stated that she has never seen anyone insult Commissioner Masters. Heather described the Commissioner as taking matters personally at times and becoming defensive. She recalled the Commissioner stating that no one “had her back.”

Heather asserted that the Commissioner asked multiple times for help, including in public meetings and forums. Heather represented that the Commissioner often admitted that she did not know answers and would state “We can’t do this alone; we need help.” Heather agreed with the decision to bring Anne on board to assist the agency, and felt that it was a good choice. Heather attended the meeting with Luis, Sarah, Angela, and the Commissioner to address this topic. She asserted that the Commissioner did not seem offended and never disagreed with the proposal.

Heather stated that after some time, the Commissioner became distant, at which point the majority of Heather’s contact with DFPS came through Julie. Heather did become aware of internal conflicts within DFPS through Julie, but denies engaging in dialogue on those matters. Heather asserted that neither herself nor Julie blamed the Commissioner for DFPS’s problems. Heather perceived that the Commissioner became distant because Heather’s OOG portfolio also including working with HHSC, an agency that sometimes was adverse to DFPS. Heather added that she had a different personality than the OOG’s previous DFPS advisor and did not have time to engage in a more friendly, personable dialogue with the Commissioner. Heather described the Commissioner as having an approach of “you’re either 100% with DFPS or you’re against DFPS.” Heather believes that these factors may have led to heightened tensions for Commissioner Masters.

Heather acknowledged having a friendly but professional relationship with Julie, which included a handful of encounters outside of the workplace over a period of years. Heather denied ever representing to Julie that the Commissioner was causing problems within DFPS and she also denied yelling at Julie about sending a letter to the OOG. Heather believes that her conversations with Julie were always professional and that Julie did not gratuitously contact Heather unnecessarily to speak ill of Commissioner Masters. Heather further declared that she did not perceive Julie as being “anti-Jaime.”

During her OOG tenure, Heather did offer to visit DFPS to gain better insight into the inner workings and operations, so she could assess what resources might be beneficial to the agency. Heather pointed out that OOG staff had done the same with other agencies. She denies that she ever planned or intended to office at DFPS. Heather stated the OOG’s treatment toward Commissioner Masters was no different than what other agencies received, and that DFPS warranted more attention and received such. She stated that the OOG had a real desire to provide DFPS and the Commissioner with needed help and resources.

6. On October 23, 2022, I interviewed Luis Saenz. Luis admitted that he has known Julie for over ten years and has a friendly relationship with her and her husband. Luis asserted that he thought he had a good working relationship with the Commissioner, and he initially believed she was doing a good job. He mentioned that members of the Legislature approached him with concerns about Commissioner Masters, so he wanted to provide her with tools to succeed. He believed that Julie and Anne could help. Luis stated that during his conversations with members of the Legislature, he tried to defend the Commissioner.

Luis said that the Commissioner contacted him in recent months and asked whether she would be re-nominated. He responded that he was not sure whether she could get the requisite votes in the Senate. He also recalled an instance when the Commissioner confronted him about Julie making comments that the OOG planned to fire her. Luis responded by informing Commissioner Masters that he would not fire her through Julie.

Luis asserted that he never witnessed Commissioner Masters treated unfairly and maintained that he always had professional interactions with her that were never disrespectful. He also stated that he never told Julie anything that he didn't also share with the Commissioner. Luis represented that he never had concerns over the Commissioner contacting him and had regular meetings with her.

Luis maintains that Commissioner Masters has authority to hire and terminate. He asserted that he thought Julie and Anne could help her and that he had no intention of replacing Commissioner Masters. Luis was hopeful that everyone would work together. He mentioned that during the meeting regarding the addition of Anne, he did tell Commissioner Masters that Anne would have decision-making authority. He added that Commissioner Masters expressed no disagreement.

Luis also recalled a meeting with the Commissioner regarding Julie's job performance. He recalled Commissioner Masters complaining of Julie's language and drinking. Luis responded that she should not terminate Julie. He stated that Julie is beneficial and was helping DFPS with the Legislature. Luis claimed that he was never making that representation because of his friendship with Julie, noting that he had to fire friends in the past.

Luis acknowledged that he tried to provide Commissioner Masters with tools and people she needed to be successful and "probably fought to defend her more."

7. On October 24, 2022 and October 27, 2022, I interviewed Peggy Venable. Commissioner Masters hand-delivered her lengthy written complaint to Peggy on October 19, 2022. Peggy described her relationship with the Commissioner as professional, but not personal. Peggy asserted that in the past the Commissioner had expressed concern with feeling undermined by Julie, but Peggy referred her to Luis or Sarah. Peggy described Commissioner Masters as being constantly concerned and frustrated, specifically with her staff. Peggy denied ever hearing of any complaints from the Commissioner about OOG staff.

Peggy informed me that Commissioner Masters only became aware of her Cherokee Nation citizenship a couple of months ago. The Commissioner unexpectedly contacted Peggy to alert

her to that fact, so she could include it as part of her appointee file. Peggy indicated that this was unusual and she had never known another appointee to do this.

Approximately one month ago, Peggy received a call from the Commissioner stating that she was frustrated and might resign. Peggy recalled the Commissioner always expressing that people would never help her and complaining about Julie. Peggy acknowledged that this was a change because initially the Commissioner was happy to have Julie and Anne at DFPS, but then the Commissioner expressed feeling undermined.

Peggy also described how the Commissioner contacted her approximately two weeks ago to ensure that Peggy had received a letter given to the OOG from Chair Bonnie Hellums of the Texas Family and Protective Services Council. The letter was of a complimentary nature and Peggy suspects that it was written at the request of Commissioner Masters to bolster her role.

More recently, Peggy stated that Commissioner Masters contacted her requesting a meeting on October 19, 2022. Peggy did not get back to her, but the Commissioner nonetheless appeared at Peggy's office. Peggy mentioned that Commissioner Masters appeared distraught and upset, as though she were on the verge of tears. The Commissioner handed her a file folder in the lobby and stated that she had a letter to share. Peggy represented that she had no idea the contents of the letter and inquired as to whether the Commissioner was okay. Commissioner Masters replied that she was and left the office. Before leaving, Commissioner Masters warned Peggy that she had consulted with an attorney.

Peggy acknowledged that this is a unique situation amongst all the appointees she has witnessed in her role as Director of Appointments. She speculated that the Commissioner felt it was more important to please members of the Legislature and retain her role than to perform her job and work together as a team. Peggy stated that she has never witnessed any hostile or unequal treatment of DFPS by OOG staff, much less directed toward Commissioner Masters. She mentioned that this is very much an inclusive, team environment.

8. On October 24, 2022, I interviewed Madi Fletcher. Madi began working with the OOG in May 2022. During the first few months of her employment, Heather helped Madi learn her new OOG portfolio. Madi stated that she never heard any OOG staff comment on the Commissioner to anyone outside of the OOG, although she does acknowledge that Julie and Anne both expressed concerns to her regarding Commissioner Masters. Madi stated that she does agree that Commissioner Masters has significant shortcomings in performing her role. However, she denied ever expressing her opinion to anyone outside of the OOG and asserted that she remained neutral and merely offered a listening ear when DFPS employees voiced concern.

Madi expressed issues with the Commissioner regarding her lack of communication with the OOG. Specifically, Madi recalled Commissioner Masters telling her that she did not approve of Julie informing OOG staff of DFPS activities. Madi responded that she needs to be kept in the loop and that the Commissioner's failure to do so forces Madi to rely on Julie. Madi does not recall telling the Commissioner how to communicate with Julie. Madi informed me that she had several conversations with Commissioner Masters about keeping an open line of communication. Madi perceived that the Commissioner was receptive at first but eventually seemed to view these

conversations as a reprimand and became defensive. Madi stated that the Commissioner had a strong distrust of Julie and Anne and did not want to be usurped. Madi does not feel that she can trust the Commissioner to be honest.

Findings:

Having conducted an investigation of a written complaint spanning 20 pages, I am unable to substantiate Commissioner Masters's claims of hostile and disparate treatment by Luis Saenz, Sarah Hicks, or Heather Fleming. I am further unable to substantiate that a hostile work environment was created at DFPS due to the actions of any OOG employees.

1. While it is clear that there were significant tensions and stressors between the Commissioner and DFPS employees, it does not appear that Commissioner Masters attempted to communicate the significance of these breakdowns to OOG staff outside of a single meeting.

Further, it seems that the majority of OOG staff did not offer an opinion as to how Commissioner Masters should handle her issues with DFPS staff and left this to her discretion as the head of that agency. Luis did comment that Julie should remain employed with DFPS, but it appears that the Commissioner never attempted to follow up on this issue or raise her concerns with other members of OOG staff.

As the Chief Executive Officer of Texas, it is the role of the Governor to ensure that state agencies run successfully and for the benefit of citizens. Knowledge of agency activities and an open line of communication are essential to performing this duty. It is my belief that these key things were sought from Commissioner Masters and she misinterpreted this approach as unduly intrusive.

2. There is no evidence of hostile or disparate treatment toward Commissioner Masters by any OOG staff. It is acknowledged that difficult conversations were necessitated by the nature of DFPS's duties within Texas's executive branch. However, everyone reports that these conversations were of a professional nature and that the treatment of DFPS and the Commissioner were no different than what other agencies experience. Based on my investigation, I believe that significant issues within DFPS warranted careful oversight by the OOG.

3. There is also no evidence of bias or discrimination against Commissioner Masters. The Commissioner does not reference any specific statements or communications that would constitute such treatment, and I was unable to uncover any such statements. Commissioner Masters is the only person who has called attention to her race or gender, as she did in her voluminous complaint. There is no evidence that anyone from the OOG acted in a biased or discriminatory nature toward Commissioner Masters, nor that any other agency received favorable treatment on the basis of anyone's race or gender.

4. Outside of rumors and speculation, there is no direct evidence that any OOG staff threatened Commissioner Masters's appointment in order to spur agency action. The written complaint refers to rumors among Julie Frank and other DFPS staff regarding the status of Commissioner

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Masters's official position. There is no evidence, however, that these rumors came from OOG staff.

From: Governor Greg Abbott Press Office <GovernorAbbottPress@public.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Monday, November 28, 2022, 6:07 PM
To: james.sullivan@gov.texas.gov
Subject: Governor Abbott Announces New Senior Leadership Of DFPS



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

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Governor Abbott Announces New Senior Leadership Of DFPS

AUSTIN - Governor Greg Abbott today announced new leadership appointments at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) that strengthen the agency's mission of serving vulnerable adults and children across Texas by providing high-quality programs and services. Effective immediately, DFPS Associate Commissioner for Adult Protective Services Kezeli "Kez" Wold will take over as interim DFPS Commissioner, with Stephanie Muth assuming the role of Commissioner effective January 2, 2023. Additionally, Anne Heiligenstein will return to DFPS in a Senior Adviser role to lead a number of key projects at the agency.

"Children and families across Texas will benefit greatly from the expertise and deep understanding of child welfare that this new leadership team brings to DFPS," said Governor Abbott. "As a recognized administrator and organizational leader, Stephanie will contribute her deep understanding of agency operations and increased accountability to strengthen the efforts of this critical agency. I am grateful for Kez's strong leadership and steady hand during this transition and to Casey Family Programs for making Anne available to return to DFPS to direct many important projects. I look forward to working with these knowledgeable, dedicated public servants to provide Texas children with the best care and services possible."

Beginning January 2, Stephanie will lead DFPS and help guide the agency as it continues rolling out [Community-Based Care](#) (CBC) services statewide, as well as furthering the agency's compliance with the remedial orders in the foster care litigation. CBC is designed to provide improved foster care services for children by giving local communities the flexibility to find innovative ways to meet the unique and individual needs of children and their families in communities across Texas.

Stephanie Muth specializes in health and human services policy, design, and operations. Prior to establishing her consulting practice in June 2020, she worked in Texas state government for 20 years, including working in the Texas legislature and executive branch and holding senior executive level positions at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) for more than 15 years. During her career, Stephanie has modernized the Texas eligibility system and successfully overseen a large-scale reorganization of health and human service programs. As State Medicaid Director, she managed the operational and policy aspects of a health care delivery system that provides services to more than 4 million Texans. Stephanie has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Florida and a Master's of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.

Kez Wold currently serves as DFPS' Associate Commissioner for Adult Protective Services, a nationally recognized program known for its innovation and client services. He began his career as a child and adult protective services caseworker, front-line supervisor, subject matter expert in risk and self-neglect, program administrator, and regional director. Prior to his role as Associate Commissioner for Adult Protective Services, Kez was the Director of Field for seven years. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Texas Lutheran College and a Master's in Public Administration from Texas State University.

Anne Heiligenstein is the current Texas Strategic Consultant for Casey Family Programs. She joined Casey after retiring from state service as the Commissioner of DFPS. Prior to leading DFPS, she was the Deputy Executive Commissioner for HHSC, where she managed the Medicaid/CHIP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, and Refugee Assistance eligibility programs. While working for Casey, she has been assisting with efforts to strengthen Texas' child welfare system, including safely reducing the number of children in foster care and improving the lives of those in care. Anne has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas at Austin, a Master's of Science from Trinity University, and is a former Fellow of the Eli Broad Foundation Academy, which trains and develops education leaders throughout the country.

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