Good afternoon.

It is my pleasure to be here today with my fellow Commissioners to speak about the very exciting changes proposed for the Department of Children and Families.

I believe that the proposed realignment represents both a recognition of the positive changes that have taken place since July 2007 when this department was created, and a commitment to build on the successes of DCF in serving children, families and communities. These changes are first and foremost about being able to improve services to some of New Jersey’s most vulnerable citizens, by reducing bureaucracy and building on existing successful service models and programs. As Governor Christie has said, “...to treat the whole child and the whole family in one place!”

I would like to begin this afternoon with a brief overview of the proposed changes, specifically the aspect of the proposal that has been most talked about, to shift the responsibility of serving children with intellectual and developmental disabilities from DHS to DCF. I am pleased to share that we have received overwhelmingly favorable feedback from parents, advocates and stakeholders about this proposal – as everyone agrees it is time to provide easier and more understandable access to state services for all families. Families in need of services must currently reach out to numerous New Jersey departments and agencies – essentially knocking on many doors to find the answers they need. This proposed integration will end the fragmentation of services that has historically been an obstacle to access and quality. There will now be one door where parents can confidently go to find support, answers and assistance.

To accomplish this, the current children’s system of care will also be broadened to provide an integrated approach to services for adolescents with substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. As the state has aligned mental health services for adults under DHS and children under DCF, this budget supports the alignment of addiction treatment services for adults and children.

Through a newly constituted division – the Division of Child Integrated System of Care Services (DCISCs), families will be able to access needed services through the department’s already existing infrastructure. This will better position DCF to support children and youth with developmental disabilities, behavioral health challenges, those needing addiction services, and those with co-occurring disorders.
As we all know, some of our most vulnerable children have more than one need; this change will eliminate the silos that for too long have hampered and delayed access to services for those children. This expansion of DCF’s current system for children’s behavioral health will improve opportunities for wellness and recovery through integration of services.

One of the areas I am most excited about under the proposed realignment plan is the integration of the Division on Women into DCF’s newly-named Division of Family and Community Partnerships. DCF currently provides an array of services to women and often works with many of the same community providers as DOW. I believe that by bringing the services currently contracted by the Division on Women together with the programs and services provided by DCF, we will enhance our ability to address the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and to better address the all too often co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence. Again this will provide another opportunity for the department to decrease fragmentation of services and improve outcomes for women and their families.

Another DCF program that supports women and children is our Home Visitation Program. As you may have heard, we learned yesterday that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded New Jersey a grant totaling more than $9.4 million to support the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. Oversight and implementation of this grant is a collaborative effort between the Department of Health and Senior Services, and DCF. The funding will allow us to expand our evidenced-based home visitation programs for perinatal screenings and risk assessments to promote earlier identification and coordination of services for at-risk families and those who reside in at-risk communities. These programs not only improve maternal and child health, family functioning and stability, but they help prevent child abuse and neglect.

In closing, I would like to assure you that I believe this realignment plan is responsible and forward-thinking. I am confident that the proposed realignment of services for children, families and women will provide an opportunity to serve the citizens of New Jersey in a more meaningful, appropriate way. By providing a single point of entry at the Department of Children and Families, while also offering a wider and more comprehensive array of services that are easier to access and navigate, we will create a seamless system of care that will undoubtedly have a positive impact on both the quality of services delivered and outcomes for the people we serve.

Thank you very much for your time and attention today.