

May 7th, 2017 - Jacqueline Ford - Foster Care and Adoption Specialist at the State Department of Children and Families.

Subject Matter: May is National Foster Care month and this week Jacqueline Ford, Foster Care and Adoption Specialist at the State Department of Children and Families, discussed foster care with the ultimate goal of reunifying placed children with their original families. She explained that foster care is a temporary arrangement that they make for a child who is unable to stay in their home with their family because they are unsafe. She says they make arrangements for them to be put in a temporary home ... a foster care home, while they work together with the family to rehabilitate them so they can begin to care for their children safely. Ford says there are many different reasons why children have to go into foster care, such as the child being abused or neglected at home. She says parents may have issues they are dealing with that prevent them from adequately caring for their child. Ford says in most cases children come into their care for issues of neglect.

Jacqueline Ford says they have people who are licensed foster parents all over the state that are ready and waiting to care for a child. She says when a child comes into foster care it's an immediate placement, as they are looking for a home for that child that very same day. Ford says they call families who are licensed to take in a child like the one they have removed. For example, a particular gender, culture, or the behavioral issues that child has, and they look for a match and hopefully a placement. She says they do have the ability to license a family for up to 3 children depending on the foster home's room to take in that many and their interest.

Jacqueline Ford of the DCF says foster parents do get reimbursement money from the State of Connecticut for the care they are providing for the foster children. She says it's on a good faith basis, reimbursing them for the food the child is eating, the electricity, all of the expenses that they have day to day. So, the foster parent is reimbursed financially on a monthly basis. She says the state also takes care of the child's medical insurance, so there really shouldn't be any outside costs to the foster family.

Jacqueline Ford told listeners that anyone looking to be a foster parent should call 888-kid-hero and pre-register for one of their open houses, which is an informational session. She says there they learn all about their program, about the children, about the rewards and benefits to the foster family, and then they'll fill out paperwork. Ford says that requires background assessments, criminal and local

May 7th, 2017 - (Ford continued) - background checks, and as long as the person is at least 21 years of age or older, have a stable income and a safe home ... then they can be assessed for being a foster parent. She says they can be married, widowed, single, straight, gay, lesbian ... they will consider everyone.

DCF Foster Care Specialist Jacqueline Ford says that relatives are the first people that they look to, to be foster parents while the natural parent(s) are going through issues. At the end of all foster cases the goal is to reunify the child with the original home and parents. Ford says their reunification rate here in Connecticut is about 50%. She says the foster parent is integral in this happening, as well as working with the birth family ... so it's a team effort.

Ford says interest in being a foster parent is very high. She says these foster families can often be their best recruiters because they tell everyone how rewarding it is to be a foster parent and how other people should do that also. She says their website is www.ctfosteradopt.com where people can get information. Ford says making a difference in the life of a child is the reason most people want to be a foster parent. She says they are selfless ... but it is very rewarding. Ford says at any given time there are around 4-thousand kids in the foster care program. She told the ultimate goal at the end is a reunification with their birth parents ... but sometimes that doesn't work out and the foster parent ends up adopting the child. She says about 90% of adoptions come through foster care.

May 14th, 2017 – Shawn Lang - Aids Connecticut Deputy Director.

Subject Matter: On this week's Dialogue show Shawn Lang, Aids Connecticut Deputy Director, talks about the situation with aids these days in the state. The issue isn't in the spotlight like it was years ago because of much more effective drugs to treat HIV/aids. But Lang says in the State of Connecticut we've had over 21-thousand people diagnosed with HIV and aids, and close to 11-thousand of those folks are still living with HIV. She says the cities of Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport are the hardest hit in the state. Lang says while the issue of aids has faded from public minds, for those in the trenches like herself it is very much with them every day. She says they've seen some really great things happen with advances in medication and the availability of syringe exchange services completely reversing the amount of HIV infections among injecting drug users.

Shawn Lang says however they are starting to see here in Connecticut and

May 14th, 2017 - (Lang continued) - across the country a disturbing new trend of young Black and Latino men who have sex with men becoming infected. She says they are a tougher population to reach because there aren't the same kind of gay hubs in Connecticut there used to be. Lang says so many people use apps on their phone or other dating sites to connect with people either for dating or for sex, so that's a little more exclusive. She says they do have staff that are on those apps with messages to ask about HIV and where to get tested. But it's a lot different than it was 30 years ago. She explained unfortunately often times HIV is a disease of poverty and they have less access to healthcare to treat the disease. Lang says there can also be a language barrier in getting information to them to prevent them from getting the disease.

Aids Connecticut Deputy Director Shawn Lang also says unfortunately these days there's not enough of aids prevention education going on in our schools. She says it's very frustrating. Lang says the State Department of Education actually does have great guidelines on that... and it should be included ... but unfortunately local school districts and school boards get to decide what to offer, if anything at all. Lang says often times when sex education is taught it holds back on information, such as the correct way to use a condom to protect them from getting HIV.

Shawn Lang told on the show that the Centers for Disease Control recommended routine testing for HIV in 2006. She says they know that most health providers are not doing sexual health histories with their patients and are not asking about HIV, or offer HIV testing. So, they may not know until they develop some health symptoms, then go to the doctor or emergency room, get tested, and find out they've been living with HIV for some time ... and sadly they may have been infecting other people. She says it's a simple blood test that will determine whether they are HIV positive or not.

On the other hand, Shawn Lang says Connecticut has had remarkable success with the syringe exchange program. She says the number of infections has dropped among injecting drug users by almost 40% since 2002. She says needle exchange programs also offer HIV testing, so these people get tested and know their status. Another exciting new element she told is the distribution of the opioid reversing drug Narcan which saves lives. Lang says there have been over 200 overdoses that have been reversed thanks to Narcan being distributed, bringing those people back to life.

May 21st, 2017 - Eric Hammerling - Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association.

Subject Matter: On this week's show Eric Hammerling, Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, told that they are very fearful of what state budget cuts could mean to state parks. He told there are two reasons why state parks always seem to get targeted every time there are budget cuts.

Hammerling says state parks are entirely dependent on the general fund for support, and when cuts come the general fund is what takes the largest hit, and the parks being dependent on the general fund for funding gets hit along with it. The other reason Hammerling told is that sometimes politicians like to make statements that are going to get people's attention, and because there are so many people that enjoy the state parks – 8-million people visit the state parks every year – he says it certainly gets attention when the parks are proposed for cuts. But he says every time there's a proposal to cut the state parks they take it very seriously.

Hammerling says there have been a couple of proposals that would be extremely damaging. He says in Governor Malloy's revised budget there's a proposal that could cut 6.5 million dollars from the state parks, and perhaps move a number of the parks to what they call "passive management." Hammerling says rather than call it passive management, they should really term it "active mismanagement" because the restrooms won't get cleaned, there won't be trash pickup, or basic maintenance to make sure people are safe and the places are beautiful. He says the only places where all of that will still be taking place (if that budget cut is approved) are places where people are paying admission, which is really unfair.

Eric Hammerling says as it is, even without new budget cuts coming, the amount of state park maintainers has really dwindled over the years. He told that back in 1971 when the state had less parks than they do now, there were 215 park maintenance workers. Now here in 2017 there are only 35 ... and that number is going down with the word the other day that 12 of them were getting pink slips. Hammerling says if they ever implement the 6.5 million dollar cut proposed by the governor, that would result in additional employees losing jobs.

Eric Hammerling of the Connecticut Forest and Park Association says the economic value of parks and state forests to the State of Connecticut was figured out in a study done a few years ago by Uconn that quantified what the economic benefits are of state parks and forests to the citizens of Connecticut. He says it showed state parks and forests are an economic benefit of over a billion dollars a

May 21st, 2017 - (Hammerling continued) - year to the state. Hammerling says that's money that actually hits Connecticut's coffers. Plus, he told that the state parks support over 9-thousand private sector jobs. So, he says for every dollar spent on the state parks, there 38-dollars that comes back to the state's coffers. Hammerling asked what kind of investments can you find anywhere that have that kind of positive impact. He says he hopes they don't lose sight of that as they are fighting over the budget.

Eric Hammerling says there's clearly a need to generate new revenues for the state parks that are sustainable. He told they are supporting a "Passport for the Parks" proposal where people when they renew their vehicle registrations every other year, would pay 10-dollars and in return they'd be able to get into the state parks for free, which would include parking as well. Hammerling says if everyone participated that could raise 14-million dollars a year. He says their entire budget is about 18-million dollars a year, so that's a significant amount of sustainability that would be added to the state parks. Hammerling says he is very hopeful that can be passed this legislative session.

Hammerling also on the show told about another thing they are trying to get through the legislature is a state constitutional amendment that concerns how the state deals with its own properties. He says sometimes, especially at the end of a legislative session in a conveyance bill, something will be attached for the sale of park or forest lands or a wildlife management area ... but without the opportunity for public input. He says this isn't right, so this constitutional amendment would say that state land could only be sold after a public hearing on it, and a 2-thirds approval in each chamber specifically on that piece of land, not thrown in with others. It passed last year in the legislature, but not with enough support, so they need to pass it again this year with just a simple majority and then it would go to the voters of Connecticut to decide on the 2018 ballot.

May 28th, 2017 - Tony Hwang – State Senator, Republican from Fairfield.

Subject Matter: On this Dialogue edition State Senator Tony Hwang discussed the effort to expand casino gambling here in Connecticut, and why he is 100% opposed to it. The two American Indian tribes that run the Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun casinos want to jointly run a 3rd casino they want to build in East Windsor, to stem the flow of potential customers to a casino that is being built in Springfield, Massachusetts by MGM. The Mashantucket Pequots and Mohegan tribes say the 3rd casino in East Windsor is needed so Connecticut doesn't lose money to the neighboring casino in Springfield, and that the 3rd casino in East Windsor would also mean more jobs here in Connecticut.

But Senator Tony Hwang says he's opposed to an added casino in the state because of the societal cost of gambling addiction. He says it's one of those unpleasant things in the residual effects of gambling that people often turn away from and sweep under the rug. Senator Hwang admitted that the State of Connecticut has had a uniquely good relationship with the Native American tribes with regards to gambling at their casinos, from which the states get a percentage of the slots revenue. He says it has existed for over 20-plus years and Hwang says they have been a good partner. But he says those casinos have been on tribal land and they've learned to co-exist. Senator Hwang says the expansion plan to add a 3rd casino in East Windsor however would be off of tribal land and be a fundamental shift away from that, allowing them to have sovereignty on public land. Senator Hwang says he doesn't feel it's lawmakers job to enable and empower gambling expansion in the state.

On the issue of societal impact, Senator Hwang says this is something that has not been studied well enough with its effects on people here in Connecticut. He says the last study was done back in 2009. He says since that time there's been a plethora of gambling expansion in the state, not just in the casinos, but with expanded lottery games and internet gambling. Senator Hwang says a lot of religious and community groups are also opposed to casino expansion in Connecticut. He says these groups are helping those that are most at risk and vulnerable, helping them pick up the pieces of their broken lives after they've become addicted to gambling. Senator Hwang says the whole debate over casino expansion has felt like a David vs. Goliath battle. He says all over the airwaves there's been messages expounding on the wonderful aspects of casinos, celebrating gambling ... but he told we've not seen all of the pitfalls of those who get addicted

May 28th, 2017 - (Hwang continued) - to gambling. Senator Hwang asks if we are really trying to get rid of social ills and addiction, why are we looking to expand gambling? He says it's all due to money ... but money should not be put in front of the social impact that devastates people's lives. Senator Hwang says gambling addiction is the single highest cause of suicides in our society.

Senator Tony Hwang says he doesn't want another casino anywhere in the State of Connecticut. Despite the moral dilemma however he does feel that if the state is going to entertain adding a 3rd casino, it should do a study to find out what part of the state would yield the greatest revenue from its location. He says since this seems to be all about money and the state's economic crisis, they may as well maximize their revenue efforts. Senator Hwang also says the whole idea of allowing the two Indian tribes (Mashantucket Pequots and Mohegans) to have a 3rd casino off of their reservations is going to open up constitutional risks, knowing full well that MGM and another Connecticut tribe, the Schaghticoke Indian tribe are going to sue over equal access to run a casino in the state.

June 4th, 2017 - Suzanne Aresco – Director – Director of Travel for AAA in Hartford.

Subject Matter: On the show Suzanne Aresco, Travel Director for AAA in Hartford, discussed how things look for travel this year. She told that with higher consumer confidence and people with discretionary income, there's a pent-up demand for people to travel this year. Aresco says initially people might go within a 50-100 mile radius, but with the eye later in the summer to take a bigger vacation to even a foreign country. She told that river cruises are still very popular for both families and couples.

Of course, these days with the internet many people book their own travel. But Suzanne Aresco says the AAA and other travel agents are still very beneficial to people looking to travel because they have the expertise and the knowledge to make it a perfect vacation for people. She says people often times do their own advance research on what they want to do on a vacation and then the agent can put it all together and make it happen. Aresco also explained that going through a travel agency does not cost the consumer any more money than if they did it themselves because the agents make their money off of their partner vendors.

One thing that is a concern again however is terrorism in the world with

June 4th, 2017 - (Aresco continued) - the recent attacks in France and the United Kingdom. Suzanne Aresco says while it may scare some people from taking a vacation from going overseas, many American travelers are resilient and won't be held back from traveling. She says it does raise awareness that people need to be cautious in their surroundings. Aresco advised to be aware of your surroundings, do more planning before going, and not linger at places that could be targets. While she says some maybe more inclined to explore the U.S. now instead of taking a chance going overseas, she told they really have not seen a decrease in European travel.

As far as popular destinations, Suzanne Aresco of the AAA told that for foreign travel abroad Italy, Ireland, Asia, India, African safaris, and Iceland believe it or not is growing in popularity for travelers. Back here in the U.S. she says Florida with Disney and Universal are always popular, as are the national parks across the U.S. She also says that there is renewed interest in people taking vacations to Hawaii ... which is a long trip from Connecticut.

Another difficulty that has been in the headlines as of late has been increased traveler tensions with airlines over air travel. Aresco says most of the time there are full flights, sometimes overbooked, with small seats and tight spaces. She did advise to book well in advance and get seat assignments. Aresco also discussed a couple of ways to get through those TSA and customs lines quicker. She says you can get TSA Pre-Check for \$85 for 5-years, and for foreign travel there's Global Entry, which is \$110 for 5-years and that gets you expedited entry back into the United States after traveling to a foreign country.

June 11th, 2017 - Henry Talmage – Executive Director of the Connecticut Farm Bureau.

Subject Matter: On this show Henry Talmage, Executive Director of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, discussed issues that concern farmers in the state. With the budget crisis, he told that farmers are concerned about talk that the State Department of Agriculture could be merged with the State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection ... which they don't want and had a rally at the State Capitol to discourage that. Talmage explained that the Department of Agriculture is somewhat unique as a state agency. He says it has a regulatory role that it plays with its dairy and animal health divisions and the bureau of inspection, as well as land protection and marketing responsibilities which concern farmland

June 11th, 2017 – (Talmage continued) – preservation. Talmage told the Department of Agriculture is in addition charged with the promotion of agriculture. So, he says their greatest concern would be that the working relationship farmers have with the Department of Agriculture, which is a relatively small agency, and the way they help farmers to expand opportunity would just be one of many priorities in a much larger agency like DEEP.

One thing that Henry Talmage says they are happy about is that Governor Dannel Malloy supports them in their view that the Department of Agriculture should not be merged with any other state agency and he added that Governor Malloy's administration has been fantastic for agriculture in the state. Talmage says the governor has put programs together for energy assistance when there's been weather related issues. He says the governor has also developed programs like the farmland restoration program. So, Talmage says Gov. Malloy has been a good governor for agriculture ... but fears that when the budget process goes behind closed doors there could be further calls to merge the Department of Agriculture with another agency. He says they have urged farmers to reach out to their legislators to tell their story and explain how they work with the Department of Agriculture and how this merger concept could be really detrimental to the industry. He says they are going to stay engaged so that lawmakers understand the impact on agriculture and what it means to the farming community.

Henry Talmage says one good thing these days is that people are very aware of farmers and agriculture in the state with the popularity of farmer's markets in recent times. He says people like to know their food is locally grown. Talmage says here in Connecticut they are actually seeing an increase in the number of farms. He told that for the 2007-2012 USDA agriculture census Connecticut picked up almost a thousand farm units ... so there are now 6-thousand in the state. Talmage says in Connecticut the vast majority of farms are small part-time farms. But he says that's really good because it means a lot of people are interested not only in agriculture ... but interested enough to participate in growing and producing.

Talmage pointed out that the definition of agriculture in Connecticut is pretty broad that includes not only food, but the greenhouse and nursing industry, as well as aquaculture like shellfish. He says there are trends too, for example tobacco is trending downward now, whereas dairy is pretty constant in terms of the number of animals. Meantime he says they are seeing more smaller-scale fruit and

June 11th, 2017 - (more Talmage continued) – vegetable operations which has a pretty strong direct to consumer profile with farm stands. So, it's a diverse scene with agriculture here in Connecticut. Talmage says there's also a term called "Agritourism" – which is the engagement of the public many times coming to farms to buy things at their retail stands and interacting with the person who actually grows the product. Talmage says this is a trend that will likely continue as it has expanded beyond fruits and vegetables to pies, wines, and cheeses as well.

Also on the show, Henry Talmage with the Connecticut Farm Bureau discussed the success of the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. He told that it has protected over 42-thousand acres of farmland since its inception back in 1978. Talmage says this prevents farm property from being turned into a mini-mall or housing. He added that when the general public is asked about protecting farmland they generally support it in the area of 80%.

June 18, 2017 – Denise Merrill - Connecticut Secretary of the State

Subject: Merrill discussed proposed changes in election laws that received a lot of attention, but ultimately did not win legislative approval this year. One major bill would have led to a state constitutional amendment process to allow Connecticut voters the opportunity to engage in so-called "early voting." Already in use in the majority of states, early voting involves varying patterns of additional voting days before the traditional November election day. It could be done on weekends prior to election day, or on several days in the week prior to election day, depending on rules set up by the state. The purpose of early voting is to give today's very busy voters more opportunities to cast their ballots in case job or family commitments make it tough for them to go to the polls on the actual election day. Critics say it would be costly for towns, but Merrill said the state could permit towns to stage the extra days at one location, such as town hall, instead of opening up all the local polling places. The other major election change that fell short of approval was the "national popular vote" concept, a bid to allow Connecticut to join a growing coalition of states that would endorse the winner of the popular vote in the Presidential election. A participating state would agree to cast its electoral votes for the popular vote winner, even if a majority of that state's voters chose the some other candidate. Supporters say this would insure that the candidate who won people's hearts across the nation would be elected, instead of choosing a winner via the antiquated electoral college system. Critics countered that the

“national popular vote” strategy was an “end run” around the electoral college and the U.S. Constitution. Merrill also discussed the continuing controversy over alleged Russian “hacking” of the 2016 Presidential election. She wanted to make a distinction between the actual voting process, and the overall election system. Merrill said it is virtually impossible for outsiders to “hack” the balloting on election day, because voting machines in Connecticut and across the nation are not linked in any way to a joint computer system that would lend itself to hacking. She said it might be possible to get into voter registration systems, but even that is difficult. Merrill said Russian interference, if it occurred, likely would have been limited to spreading disinformation in the United States with false news stories and related bogus efforts designed to confuse or anger the voting public.

June 25 – Peter Gioia – economist for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA).

Subject Matter: Gioia discussed Connecticut’s jobs picture, short-term and long-term, and explained why many neighboring states are doing better than Connecticut, especially in recovery performance from the devastating 2008 recession. Gioia also discussed the recent visit to Connecticut by Florida Gov. Rick Scott in a quest to lure Connecticut companies to Florida. Gioia basically dismissed Scott’s tactic as misguided because it was public and attracted media attention. Gioia said states are always trying to steal away Connecticut jobs even as Connecticut is playing the same game in other states. He noted however that most of these efforts occur behind the scenes because corporate leaders do not want to “broadcast” their business strategies until a deal is buttoned up. Gioia said Connecticut has some good programs designed to grow jobs and improve job training, but must do much more if it really wants to compete with other states. The CBIA economist used “Dialogue” to urge state lawmakers to quickly resolve the state’s deficit crisis and pass a good budget that will signal economic stability—something companies want and need to see as they ponder their future in Connecticut, and whether it makes sense to increase product lines and employee rolls in this state.

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