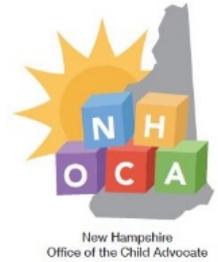




Moira O'Neill
Child Advocate

State of New Hampshire

Office of the Child Advocate



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Outgoing Child Advocate congratulates successor Cassandra Sanchez

CONCORD, N.H. - The Governor and Council approved Governor Sununu's nomination of Cassandra Sanchez as the State's next Child Advocate today. Moira O'Neill, the outgoing Child Advocate, and the State's first in the position, wished Ms. Sanchez every success as the State's primary voice for children. Sanchez last worked for the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families as a supervisor in the Kinship unit. She has a background in mental health that O'Neill noted will help inform major initiatives in New Hampshire's continued building of the community-based behavioral health system of care.

The Office of the Child Advocate began operations in January 2018 on the heels of the tragic deaths of children known to the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), the agency for child protection. Original legislation authorized the Office to oversee DCYF child protection and juvenile justice services with full access to information, including investigative and subpoena power. Under O'Neill, the jurisdiction of the Office was expanded to all State-provided, funded and arranged services for children in September 2020. Taking a prevention approach, the expansion recognized a need for advocacy for children before they were abused, neglected, or adjudicated delinquent. The Office is also mandated to provide guidance to State leaders and the public on navigating and improving the State and its service systems.

O'Neill expressed confidence Sanchez, new to New Hampshire, will be well-supported. She thanked the staff and all the supporters of the Office across the State who have held to a high standard of transparency and promotion of empirically based services for children. "The strategic planning process we undertook this past year with focus groups and stakeholder interviews taught us one important lesson," O'Neill said. "The Office belongs to the community. Their views and hopes for what the Office will achieve are aligned with statutory intent. They have identified strengths, articulated areas for improvement, and agreed upon priorities. Cassandra Sanchez will be greeted with an exceptional staff, and a committed, guiding, and expectant constituency."

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