



**Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family
MINUTES OF MEETING**

July 12, 2011

10am DCFS Iberville Building 1-129

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 AM

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called with the following results:

MEMBERS PRESENT

Lisa Andry
Sen. Sharon Weston Broome
Heather Doss
Peggy Gehbauer
David Helveston
Michael Johnson
Gene Mills
Sue Morrill
Audrey Pugh
Linda Ruffin (for Ollie Tyler)
Deanne Bingham (for Daniel Kirk)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Gordon Atwell
Neil Bernard
A. G. Crowe
Penny Dastugue
Wayne DuBose
Frank Hoffman
Fred Lowery
Tony Perkins
Fred Selby
Tiffany Simpson
Katherine Spaht
Murphy Toerner
Dorothy Wallis

OTHERS PRESENT

Dr. Gail Bonhomme -ULL - Cecil J. Picard Center
Jessica Braun -La. Legislature, Sen. Julie Quinn's office

III. BUSINESS CONSIDERED

A quorum is not present so the last meeting minutes could not be adopted.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A power point presentation was given by Dr. Gail Bonhomme of University of Louisiana at Lafayette of the Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Life-Long Learning. DSS/Support

Enforcement Services partnered with a grant by ACF. Dr. Bonhomme gave a summary of Findings both quantitative and qualitative. She read several excerpts of the fathers' writings that were studied. The project encouraged and supported the fathers to provide time and resources for their children.

Sen. Sharon Broome passed out grant opportunities that could be partnered through DCFS or other non-profit organizations.

The subcommittee report for pre and post marriage initiatives was given by Michael Johnson. He presented a power point presentation on how to reduce Louisiana Divorce Rates.

There are ten steps to take. Four months before the wedding date there would be counseling. Abstinence would be promoted. A mentoring couple would be identified to encourage the newlyweds. There would be a teaching session on reconciliation. Should there be a divorce, the last step would involve creating a step family. Mr. Johnson said the suggested strategy would be to engage a pilot program with the faith based community in the Shreveport/Bossier area. Visits would take place with area clergy. The group would seek community leaders to participate. How can marriage be improved? Meetings can take place with Skype. Support and endorsements would be sought for a day long seminar. Possibly the host could be the organization, Marriage Savers. Heather Doss said it would not just be for the clergy but for business leaders as well.

Mr. Johnson said this would cross all racial and socioeconomic lines. He said the suggested strategy would be legislation such as the Parental Divorce Reduction Act.

It should require a one year period of reconciliation and a pre-filing education class. The attendees could watch a video on divorce impact on the children. It could be further investigated on having online modules for classes.

A third alternative could be to name a responsible spouse who would 51 – 67% of custody of the child/children and would receive the same percentage of the family assets.

Mr. Johnson reported that recent research indicated 30% of divorcing couples would go to counseling.

Mr. Mills added that within 5 years of the counseling and reconciliation, the marriages are satisfactory or better than satisfactory.

Mr. Johnson suggested getting signatures from clergy, community and business leaders before our next meeting.

Sen. Broome said the commission is supportive for the next step to achieve the first strategy. First a delegation would need to meet with the Governor. Have him serve as a catalyst with the faith based and stakeholders in the community as it relates overall to healthy marriage. All has to be considered as it fits into the big picture.

Mr. Johnson said it is a revival of the importance of marriage.

In Louisiana, the non custodial parent signs acknowledging paternity at birth in hospital. While the parents are still in the hospital we can give them a brochure that promotes marriage. The idea is to get them in a committed relationship.

Sen. Broome acknowledges that there are a lot of pieces to the puzzle. How is the commission going to tie it together? The commission needs momentum. Possibly have a community gathering point and invite the Governor to the meeting to validate what the commission is trying to do. The momentum is continued by the commission members. Look at the executive order. It only lasts for a year. The commission needs to make a yearly report. We need to have members who will participate.

It is the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family.

Mr. Johnson suggested we set a date for the Governor to come to a meeting. Possibly Mike McManus of Marriage Savers can attend.

Audrey Pugh added that it needs to be an attention getter.

The next Commission will be August 23, 2011. We can try and get the Governor scheduled in September.

Sen. Broome adjourned the meeting at 12:10 AM.