Two news stories related to a similar topic—the well-being of children—were published recently within 48 hours of one another, a coincidence that highlighted the tension between the two different faces of our state’s varied institutions.

One story, a bit of a feel-good piece, covered an announcement from Gov. Lamont, who rolled out a “kids cabinet” comprised of officials across state government who will counsel him on policy and efforts to improve outcomes for children. It will be led by Vanessa Dorantes, Department of Children and Families (DCF) commissioner.

This type of press release has become synonymous with Gov. Lamont’s tenure at the Capitol, and I have little doubt the resulting media coverage of such initiatives—all positive, with little to no follow-up analysis—has helped the governor achieve the popularity he enjoys today.

The second story was much less cheery, and in fact contained shocking revelations so disconcerting I contend they cannot be ignored by the legislature. An emergency shelter in Harwinton for at-risk girls in the custody of DCF—the organization headed by Commissioner Dorantes—fell into utter chaos, with repeated calls to local police and medical response teams squeezing the small municipality’s modest resources. Among the incidents tied to the shelter, run by a DCF contractor, were physical assaults, runaways, theft, sexual assault committed by staff, injured police officers, and even an instance of sex trafficking. Worse even, are allegations that the shelter operated instructed staff to throttle back calls to law enforcement when problems arose—a claim the vendor denies. I encourage you to read the story (*A Grave Concern: A DCF Shelter for Girls Loses Control*), which can be found at insideinvestigator.com

Last week, I requested that the legislature’s Committee on Children hold a hearing on the issue, which would provide the chance for lawmakers to secure information on a variety of issues tied to the situation, including details on how DCF chooses its vendors and the level of oversight the agency has on shelters and group homes operated by contractors it pays.

This issue can’t be brushed off like so many others have been, including a handful that came to light recently through work from the state’s nonpartisan State Auditors of Public Accounts. Among problems highlighted: The Department of Social Services’ failure to recoup $120,000 in payment benefits issued to deceased clients, and the CT Paid Family Leave Authority’s failure to provide contractual documentation or receipts for $46,000 in payments made to various marketing and media consults. There’s also the matter of the University of Connecticut overpaying the school’s former president by more than $335,000 for a one-year sabbatical.

Legislative committees that have cognizance over these and other agencies and organizations can have hearings to learn more about such problems but committee chairmen—Democrats—refuse to do it. After all, that would inject balance into a state news cycle flooded by news releases from the Governor’s office promoting everything from free museum passes to the creation of a “Council on Women and Girls” to “uplift women and families.”

Perhaps that Council can take a peek into DCF policy tied to that Harwinton shelter. If anyone needed uplifting, it was those girls.

I appreciate the Governor’s persistence in positive messaging, and I understand it isn’t *entirely* about politics—I recognize the benefit to Connecticut maintaining a just-ducky façade.

Confronting and repairing problems, however, is critical. We need more of it.

When our state does that? For me, there’s no better selling point.

**Rep. Vincent Candelora
House Republican Leader**

**86th District
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