

Justice Elizabeth Weaver's Opening Remarks
Governor's Task Force Summit October 20, 2011
Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Grand Rapids, MI

Thank you all for being here at the 16th annual Summit of the Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, this year's topic: *Calling All Dads! The Importance of Fathers in Children's Lives*.

First, a few words about the Task Force – The Task Force was established by Governor Engler 20 years ago in 1991 under Federal Mandate for Michigan to qualify for over \$500,000 per year in Federal funding to review, evaluate, and make recommendations concerning child abuse and neglect cases.

The Task Force consists of a qualified and dedicated membership representing expertise in all areas of child abuse and neglect. There are 34 members appointed by the Governor--- judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, law enforcement officials, doctors, social and child welfare workers, educators, psychologists, counselors, citizens and parents. I have been the chair since the beginning and the current Task Force and I as chair were appointed last year by Governor Granholm for terms ending into 2014.

The Task Force is charged by Federal Statute with two primary responsibilities:

1. reviewing and evaluating Michigan's investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect; and
2. making recommendations about what should be done to improve and reform the investigation, administration, and judicial processing of child abuse and neglect.

In this regard the Task Force, while housed in the Department of Human Services (DHS) with a staff of one (1) full-time DHS employee funded by the federal grant requiring the Task

Force, is not a part of the DHS and never has been nor ever should be controlled by the DHS. The Task Force is responsible to make independent recommendations concerning child abuse and neglect issues to the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of government.

While cooperative with all three branches, the Task Force offers non-partisan advisory opinions concerning child abuse and neglect policies arrived at through its own independent study, experience, and work.

The work of the Task Force has and continues to include the development of protocols, the approval of awarding of grants for programs in experimental, model, and demonstration pilot programs, as well as funding for programs for training and this Summit. For example, utilizing the coordinated multi-disciplinary approach for handling child abuse cases, over the last 20 years, the Task Force has developed and funded protocols that are fair and just to both the victim and the accused. The protocols have addressed such topics as:

- coordinated child abuse investigations;
- forensic interviewing;
- coordination of services with Native American tribes;
- child death review; and
- Medical Child Abuse, formerly called Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy protocol.

In the area of training, the Task Force, in conjunction with the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan (PAAM) and the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) of the Supreme Court, has been active in the development and funding of child welfare programs, including training judges and attorneys for child abuse and neglect cases, presently contributing \$300,000 per year.

Further, the Task Force has sponsored, for the past 16 years, two day summit conferences (like this one) for the actors in the investigation, administration and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases—bringing to Michigan national experts to share their expertise concerning the many issues, problems, and possible solutions for the best practices in investigation, administration and judicial handling of these cases.

The members of the Task Force are always grateful for the opportunity to serve and help improve the way our child abuse and neglect system functions.

Now, before we continue this morning, let me recognize the members of the task force, all appointed for terms ending in 2014, who will be here during the conference. I will ask them to stand now, so if you would like to talk to them, you will know who they are and what they look like. For all the names of the Task Force members, their locations across the state, the broad categories they represent on the Task Force, and a summary of the Task Force work over the last 20 years, please see the yellow handout in your conference folder entitled the *Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect Fact Sheet*, updated January 2011. [copy of Fact Sheet updated October 2011 attached.]

And now let me recognize a few others who are here from the Central Office of DHS: DHS Deputy Director Dudley Spade; Children's Services Administration Director, Steve Yager; and other staff from DHS Central Office. I ask them to stand and be recognized. If you would like to talk to them, you know who they are and what they look like.

As we here today recognize and learn more about the importance of fathers in children's lives, and the problem of father absence, as effecting child abuse and neglect in Michigan and in our country, and as we look for solutions to the problem, I would like to share with you the most

important of my ten principles for living (found on my website:www.justiceweaver.com) that helps me to get through the challenges and roadblocks that I encounter in my life. It is:

Do Right and Fear Not.

It's easy to say but not always easy or a joy to do. But in the end, it allows for satisfying days and restful nights.

Hopefully this conference will help you determine and succeed in doing what is right and necessary in confronting and eliminating any impediments and injustices in the investigative, administrative, and judicial processes for the problem of child abuse and neglect in Michigan.

Enjoy the conference!!! Thank you.