



City of Seattle
Human Services Department

September 17, 2010

Councilmember Nick Licata, Chair
Housing, Human Services, Health, and Culture Committee
Seattle City Council
600 4th Avenue, 2nd floor
Seattle, Washington 98104

Dear Councilmember Licata:

Please find below my responses to questions submitted by Seattle City Councilmembers in your letter of August 26, 2010.

I look forward to answering any further questions Councilmembers may have during my confirmation process and during the meeting of your Housing, Human Services, Health, and Culture Committee on September 22, 2010.

RESPONSES:

1. *Please name and describe past departmental or organizational accomplishment.*

I've worked for more than 20 years in the human services field, most recently as Regional/County Director of Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services, which is part of the State of Georgia Department of Human Services and the largest human services agency in Georgia. I headed a department with six offices, 1,300 employees, and a budget of \$96 million. As Regional/County Director, I worked collaboratively with community partners to meet the needs of the county's most vulnerable families. I also provided leadership in the areas of fiscal management, strategic vision and planning, organizational growth and development, and recruitment of staff. My vision for Fulton County – as it is for the City of Seattle – was to transform the human services department into a community-based service delivery system. I accomplished that through engaging community, external and internal partners, and families in the provision of high quality human services.

Previously, I served as Director of the Youth and Family Services Division in the Mecklenburg County (North Carolina) Department of Social Services, the largest child welfare system in the state. Using the collaborative approach mentioned above, I repositioned the agency into a community-based and family-centered organization, while I managed a staff of 400 and a budget of \$47 million. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families named Mecklenburg as one of the first large urban counties to demonstrate consistent improvement in providing child welfare services.

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2. Identify achievements that are good examples of your leadership approach.

In previous positions in Fulton County, Georgia and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, I developed a clear vision for the staff and community to rally behind. Elements of this approach included:

- Setting high standards and expectations for staff and constituents;
- Communicating clearly and transparently to staff, peers, superiors and the community;
- Engaging and collaborating with community constituents and the providers' network; in previous positions I worked with constituents to develop new contracts that were outcome-based;
- Strategic thinking, planning and implementation;
- Building consensus with my staff; and
- Acting as a mentor to staff under my supervision; currently, I hear from former staff who view me as a mentor and coach and consult me for career guidance and support.

3. Describe your ability to complete projects and work programs in a timely fashion.

I establish firm but realistic internal deadlines and schedules for staff and I complete all requests and assignments from City Council or other projects and work programs within a timely manner. This process includes assigning the project to the appropriate staff and/or team members for input and completion, internal review by key leadership team members, and a final review by me or my Deputy Director.

This will ensure that the Human Services Department (HSD) submits its work projects on time or ahead of schedule.

4. What experience do you have balancing budget priorities in an environment where budget reductions are necessary?

As an executive leader, I have had extensive fiscal and budgetary responsibilities. In recent years, most of my budget responsibilities have been during a time of reduced revenues and intense scrutiny of program outcomes and fiscal management. In an environment with reduced revenues and increased services, I worked very closely with my leadership team to establish appropriate program priorities and goals. Establishing program priorities allows me to develop a realistic budget. Prior to the budget process, I ask my finance director to do preliminary projections for the upcoming budget year based on the last year's use of revenues and achievement of program outcomes. This process assists my leadership team in setting priorities for the upcoming year, particularly when the department may have decreased revenues for programs, staffing and contracts.

Once the program priorities are set, then we can use appropriate revenues to fund the program with measurable outcomes. Using measurable outcomes will demonstrate the

viability of the program and the need for continued funding. During the fiscal year, I meet regularly with my leadership team and finance director to review the status of the budget. I also have my finance director complete quarterly projections with benchmarks that demonstrate whether the department is in alignment with the budget. Reviewing the budget regularly allows my leadership team and I to make appropriate fiscal and programmatic decisions during the year.

In my most recent position as Regional/County Director of Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services, I was responsible for a budget of \$96 million. The revenues consisted of federal, state and county dollars. It was my responsibility to ensure that these revenues were spent wisely on programs and services for the citizens of Fulton County. For most of the last two fiscal years, my leadership team and I were unable to hire additional staff to provide mandated services (i.e., food stamps, Medicaid and TANF) to our constituents. This necessitated developing creative and innovative strategies to serve our constituents during this period of decreased revenues. Examples of those strategies included: increasing office hours for our constituents to apply for benefits; ensuring that our intake process was streamlined yet comprehensive, so that constituents would not have to make multiple visits to the office and additional case managers wouldn't be needed to process the applications and conduct follow-up appointments.

5. *Give an example of your strategic planning abilities and describe an experience using strategic planning.*

While I was with the Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) I made a presentation to the Commissioner for Human Services on the county's strategic plan. The plan outlined the strengths and challenges of Fulton County DFCS and highlighted areas for community and staff development. In this presentation I outlined a timetable of strategic steps we needed to take to manage two critical issues facing the state of Georgia and Fulton County.

The first issue was the preparation for a federal Child and Family services review (a federal audit of the state's largest county's child welfare program). The strategic plan described how we would prepare for the review (to be conducted in 2012) and listed specific deliverables for my leadership team, staff, and the community provider network.

The second issue was the county's response to a consent decree that resulted from a lawsuit against the state alleging poor child welfare practices that had occurred prior to my tenure. In the plan, I outlined our response, which included improvements to the working relationship between the county and state; the development of program strategies to improve child welfare case management; formation of a team focused on data integrity and continuous quality improvement to ensure we were meeting the 31 outcomes of the consent decree; and the development of practice standards to improve the overall operations of the child welfare system in Fulton County.

6. *Can you demonstrate your commitment to diversity in hiring, workplace operations, contracting and constituent services?*

As a candidate for this position, I was impressed as I read each of the department's core values. When examined individually, the value of diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence is evident. When considered collectively, it was clear to me that the passion and commitment mirrored my own.

We live in an increasingly diverse society. As a result, valuing diversity and cultural competence have become commonplace for business. To effectively carry out the work of a human services agency, valuing diversity and cultural competence are business imperatives.

Throughout my career as a human services leader, I have held firm to my commitment to ensuring that services provided and/or funding for clients in need were delivered in a culturally relevant manner that honored differences. For example, while working in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, the county was faced with a sudden growth of the emerging Hispanic population including immigrants. The county was unprepared and staff had very limited service experience with this community. Faced with the need to obtain specific language and cultural knowledge to provide quality services, we effectively recruited social service professionals from across the nation (Texas, California, New York, and Chicago) with the cultural expertise necessary to effectively serve the community. We further engaged the community and established offices within the communities to provide better services. The endeavor was a great success.

Talent drives organizational success and is not limited by ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, or religion. To attract top talent, and to deliver quality service to constituents, I remain steadfast in my commitment to leading the Seattle Human Services Department in a manner that ensures equitable recruiting, policies, and work practices are woven into the fabric of everything the department administers.

7. What is your organizational management approach?

My organizational management approach is best described as anchored on the foundational principles of alignment, collaboration, accountability, and constituent focus. The establishment of strategic integration and alignment to department objectives are both critical for success and extremely challenging. A close second involves creating a culture of ongoing assessment, continuous improvement, and accountability.

In prior positions in Chicago, Fulton County, and Mecklenburg County, I was successful at achieving both integration and ongoing assessment and, as a result, the organizations I led experienced great success. I recognize that creating the organizational culture I describe will not take place without challenges. The transition of approaching human services from a community-based model will undoubtedly bring resistance from staff and contracting agencies alike. As a leader and strategic change-agent, I am prepared to lead Seattle's Human Services Department through these challenges and feel confident that the department will emerge stronger and more effective as a result.

A critical aspect of my management approach that has contributed to my ability to meet the challenges outlined above involves removal of artificial barriers, allowing both employees and community providers direct access to me. Whether walking the halls of our offices to chat with employees or sharing a story with a provider in an agency, I believe that it is important to get out and know both employees and provider staff at all levels.

8. How do you address threats to employee morale?

I have found that threats to employee morale most often arise during times of change, when perceptions of inequity exist, or when communication breakdowns occur. As an experienced strategic change agent, I recognize the importance of anticipating declines in morale and developing human capital strategies that demonstrate empathy while maintaining the necessary engagement to move work forward.

Since joining the Seattle Human Services Department I've executed a communication strategy that ensures clear communication to staff regarding the direction of the organization. By working in partnership with my Executive and Strategic Leadership teams, we ensure that messages to staff are consistent and demonstrate that we are all working from the same script. In addition to management communications, I reach out to employees each week through the Director's newsletter to disseminate information about department direction. It has been encouraging to receive feedback from staff expressing excitement about the department's evolving direction as well as the transparent manner in which I've shared information.

I have been very intentional about broadly communicating expectations I have for department leaders. My time with HSD has been no different. In my initial meetings with my Executive Leadership and (the more broad) Strategic Leadership teams, I shared the value and responsibility that I place on each leadership role within our organization. I further shared that as leaders we are keepers of the work environment. I am establishing a work plan for leadership development within the department. To begin this important work, I've asked each leader in HSD to read a phenomenal book on leadership, "The Servant." Additionally, in partnership with my human resources manager, I will be reviewing our current performance evaluation system, making initial recommendations for changes to reflect the increased emphasis on measurable outcomes and the core competencies necessary to succeed.

9. Describe an experience that you've had with a public relations challenge? What was the outcome?

While I was the Director of the Youth and Family Services Division in Mecklenburg County (North Carolina) Department of Social Services, we encountered a horrendous child neglect case involving the "S." family. The county took into custody 11 of the 12 children age 2 to 17 years old for environmental neglect and alleged sexual abuse. The children were found at the family home in the following conditions:

- Malnourished

- Lack of running water and toilet facilities
- A ground floor that was dirt (where the children slept)
- Infestation of snakes
- Inadequate food and proper clothing
- Children assessed to be uneducable with poor linguistic skills

The parents insisted they had the right to parent and homeschool based on their religious beliefs. However, neighbors had become increasingly concerned about the living conditions and the lack of food, as the children were often seen in the neighborhood begging for food.

The case became a political and media issue in the Charlotte Observer newspaper and on local talk radio shows. I was interviewed by the Observer several times about our process for removing children when there is evidence of abuse and neglect. I also made monthly presentations to Mecklenburg County executive staff and the Board of County Commissioners. The State of North Carolina Children Services became involved in this case through reviewing our case practices to ensure that state and federal requirements were being met.

As a result of our actions, the S. children remained in foster care and were ultimately adopted. Our involvement in this case resulted in the community being better informed about child abuse and neglect issues. It also heightened the need for additional staff and made it easier to collaborate with the community.

10. What is your general philosophy for how most effectively work with a City Council, other elected officials and citizen advisory bodies? How will you be responsive to their requests in order to accomplish priorities that they have identified in those instances that their priorities compete for time with yours?

In my past positions, I worked very closely with elected officials at all levels, including a reporting and working relationship with the nine Board of County Commissioners in Mecklenburg County. I have also worked closely with citizen advisory bodies, including private provider boards of directors. I believe a strong working relationship with both of these entities is key to successfully achieving the mission of whatever organization I lead. Working with the Seattle City Council, I want to develop a strong working relationship based on trust, a shared vision, and strategies to move HSD forward and meeting our goals. I operate with integrity and am an articulate communicator in my interactions with elected officials. I will work to ensure that City Councilmembers receive accurate and timely information, including data and measureable outcomes, that will allow them to make good decisions regarding the services provided to the citizens of Seattle. Navigating competing priorities is a challenge in any position. I will work with the City Council to develop these priorities.

In my first few weeks in Seattle, I have already met with representatives from many of HSD's community partners, including coalitions, contracted agencies, funders and other governments. In my work with citizen bodies, I strive to build relationships that are based on mutual consensus. My goal is to be a good partner, working strategically to

help the citizen groups meet the best interest of their constituents. I use the same approach of trust, shared vision and transparency when working with citizen bodies. I also respect different viewpoints and opinions, and will seek out feedback from community groups that voice concerns about the direction of HSD.

11. *What experience have you had implementing technology and new systems to manage contracts with organizations and delivery of services? In your short time here do you have any observations on how we can make our systems more efficient in collection and analysis of data, as well as to improve delivery of service?*

In Mecklenburg County, I brought together private contractors in a series of strategic planning meetings to help the County develop foster care placement contracts for children entering the foster care system. We developed a three-tier payment structure which included specific deliverables for each tier. The tiers ranged from high-end foster care services to other services, including mental health, medical and dental services, educational outcomes and extracurricular activities. These contracts and payment structures were developed based on the strength of agencies.

The county also developed a database to track all payments and project the number of children who would be categorized in each of the tiers. By creating the ability to forecast spending on contracts and we were able to see if a contract process was successful and whether goals for children were being accomplished.

This process was very effective and resulted in a strong collaboration between the county and private providers to meet the needs of children. It also heightened the utilization of detailed objectives and accountability provisions. This process allowed private providers to alter their agency infrastructure, if needed.

As a result of this process the following results were achieved:

- Children were reunited with families in a timely manner;
- Children were adopted or obtained guardianship from foster parents more quickly;
- The number of multiple placements experienced by children in foster care decreased;
- Community collaboration and provider agency infrastructure in support of child welfare were strengthened.

12. *City of Seattle is currently implementing the Race and Social Justice Initiative to address racial and social inequities. In your position, how will you support and implement the Race and Social Justice Initiative? Can you provide some specific examples?*

I was excited to hear about the City's strong commitment to racial equity and social justice. In my 20-year career in human services I have seen how delivery systems and policies can perpetuate racial and ethnic disparities. The City's Race and Social Justice Initiative is aligned with my values and belief that government shouldn't substitute for families but must partner with families and communities to support them.

I am impressed with the level of commitment to race and social justice among HSD staff and will support and build on that commitment to strengthen our effectiveness in achieving positive results for all of our communities. To accomplish this, I support HSD's continuing efforts to address institutional disparities within the department – workforce equity, contracting equity, and training; and work with our leadership team, staff and our providers to improve access and achieve positive results for all our communities.

This work is particularly important to HSD's work: people of color are more likely to be homeless; children of color are more likely to be behind in school; youth of color are more likely to be "disconnected" from school and the workplace; and victims of domestic violence are more likely to be people of color.

One of my top priorities is to create a culture of accountability with the community and other stakeholders. This includes establishing common standards and practices across all program areas to imbed a racial equity lens/approach in our work. I am also creating an internal workgroup to support efforts to address changing needs and racial disparities, and to improve results for those who have been historically excluded. We also need to improve services to immigrants and refugees, and other underserved communities, and develop good data systems to measure how our programs address disparities.

13. The Human Services Department has multiple initiatives and projects. Which initiatives are you most excited to engage in, and how will you support its success?

I look forward to engaging in three major areas of focus as HSD Director:

- Preventing and ending homelessness, particularly as it impacts children and families who are immigrants and refugees;
- Preventing and ending commercial sexual exploitation of children; and
- Better utilization of family support services.

All three of these areas will allow me to use my expertise, experience, and passion for the well being of children and families. I am looking for opportunities to cross-pollinate in HSD, to ensure that the divisions are working collaboratively and developing innovative programs to address community needs.

In the case of homelessness, there are great opportunities in Seattle, including the new Gates Foundation family homelessness initiative, as well as work being done by the Committee to End Homelessness to connect the child welfare and education systems with the homeless systems. I will use my knowledge of and relationships with the child welfare system to strengthen the City's participation in both of these efforts.

In my previous work in the child welfare system, I saw children as young as 10 to 12 years old being prostituted. This is a tragedy and an issue of growing concern nationwide. HSD has started a groundbreaking program to address this issue and has partnered with City Councilmembers and community entities to elevate awareness in the community. I look forward to supporting these efforts and connecting them more

deliberately with HSD's and City departments' efforts to prevent youth violence and victimization.

HSD will be looking to support family support services through the renewal of the Families and Education Levy and two upcoming (2011) Request for Investment processes. Family support is a powerful tool for strengthening families so they can help prepare children for school. I will be touring several of our family centers in the coming weeks.

14. At the end of your time here, what achievements do you hope the Human Services Department will have accomplished? What does a successful tenure at the Human Services Department look like under your leadership?

Under my leadership, I would hope that we've created a highly effective human services delivery system that adds value and helps the constituents we serve. I'd hope that HSD would have an organizational infrastructure with strong leadership heading our divisions and staff who would collaborate throughout the department, city government, and the community, and that the department would be known as the expert in providing high quality human services to the community through strong program development, utilization of data and accountabilities, and exceptional fiscal management.

More specifically, I envision HSD would:

- Be the leading organization in family support work that would help prepare children for school;
- Work with the child welfare and court systems in decreasing youth violence and at-risk behaviors (such as prostitution);
- Develop collaborative homeless programs that covered prevention, intervention and permanent housing for individuals and families affected by homelessness; and
- Develop collaborative intergenerational programs for elders with a strong emphasis on caregiver support and family support.

15. The Strategic Investment Plan for the department includes six core community goals and twenty-three investment strategies. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this plan, in your opinion?

In early 2010, HSD completed a year-long review of its Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) Goal framework and Investment outcomes. This review was designed to ensure that the SIP aligns with the department mission, effectively tells HSD's story and reflects measureable outcomes; better facilitates evaluation of the department's investments; better captures the actual outcomes in which the department invests; clarifies and strengthens our strategies; and links SIP Goals and Strategies to corresponding community indicators. The resulting framework includes five community goals and 18 strategies. The department created additional measurable outcomes for each investment area. In addition, community indicators were developed for each strategy and data sources identified.

The SIP has several strengths which include

- High-level policy direction for the City's human services investments;
- A framework to guide HSD investment decisions;
- Clearer performance expectations and accountability in service delivery contracts; and
- Tying our investments to measures that will provide better service to clients.

In my first weeks in the department, I have also identified opportunities to strengthen the SIP by assessing the overall contracting structure, data collection and contractor accountability. Such an assessment coupled with outcome-based funding, a clear evaluation strategy, internal alignment of business practices, and enhancement of quality assurance will help ensure we are providing the most effective services to Seattle's citizens.

16. The department currently administers over 500 contracts with approximately 200 organizations. What can the department do to expand its ability to efficiently monitor compliance with contract provision and the best use of city dollars from these contracts?

I have already begun working on a plan to address this issue within the Human Services Department. This process is being initiated through internal "alignment" meetings focused on each HSD division. This process will specifically focus on the divisions' current staffing, available funding, programs and contract management. We are looking at how contracts are written and monitored, and how we can provide agencies with better technical support. The department needs to engage providers more closely in the monitoring process – a process that is based on measureable outcomes and benchmarks to be looked at on a quarterly basis. If an agency is not performing at levels required in the contract, HSD will develop a process to address non-compliance issues. As a start, we have already set up a series of meetings with our contractors beginning on Sept. 24 and running through mid-November.

17. Do you see potential for greater scalability if the department were to administer fewer contracts?

It is imperative that we assess our existing contracts with providers to see if they fit into the missions of the department and the City, and with the goals and priorities of the Mayor and City Council. This process begins with our internal alignment meetings (mentioned in the previous response). Based on these assessments, with an emphasis on data and measureable outcomes, we will be able to determine if we have "right fit" contracts, contracts that need to be consolidated, and contracts that may need to be housed elsewhere or de-funded. For instance, an agency with services for homeless people may have several contracts with the City that are administered by three different HSD divisions and contain different deliverables and different requests for data. In our alignment meetings we will focus on how we collect data and what kind of data we collect in order to help us with measureable outcomes. We will also look at program

outcomes and how services are delivered. The goal is to base contracting on a holistic and seamless approach that stresses benchmarks and measurable outcomes.

18. Where do you see potential for collaboration between human service agencies and law enforcement agencies? What is the ideal role for the police in the realm of human service delivery especially related to street crime and disorder?

Addressing a complex issue such as street crime requires close coordination and collaboration among police, probation, the court system, and human service organizations – particularly community outreach workers and case managers. Several interrelated strategies for addressing crime can benefit from the involvement of human service agencies:

- Access to services - human services providers can provide access to employment and education programs, or cultural enrichment and mentoring programs for youth.
- Intervention, including crisis intervention, access to treatment and housing, diversion programs and collaboration with community partners.
- Community engagement and mobilization - involvement of local residents and groups in conjunction with police and human service providers can improve public safety.

Some serious, violent, or chronic offenders may not be appropriate for a human service response. However, for many of the individuals involved in street crime, successfully dealing with the underlying social causes – homelessness, mental health issues or chemical dependency – can prevent future criminal involvement.

Police officers can play an important role in referring citizens involved in criminal activity to agencies that can provide crisis intervention and access to opportunities. Once social service providers are involved, they can join law enforcement personnel in holding people accountable for their crimes and behavior.

19. Do you believe that programs that cannot demonstrate effectiveness should be defunded?

Programs that cannot demonstrate effectiveness should be evaluated for future funding eligibility. In the near future HSD will be establishing realistic expectations with agencies at the beginning of the contract period to ensure that deliverables are being achieved throughout the contract year. Prior to defunding any programs, HSD will conduct a thorough assessment of contract deliverables, accountabilities, and fiscal management. The department is developing a process to effectively assess and monitor contract and outcome compliance and help agencies successfully serve their clients.

20. Do you believe the department should have specific and measurable outcomes identified for all investments?

HSD will continue to assess and develop measureable outcomes for all current contracts as well as new investments. These new investments will include input from the community and constituents – potential clients of the proposed services – prior to the development of a new contract. This will help ensure that new investment will meet the needs of the constituents who are in need of service.

21. *Do you believe the department should invest broadly in many efforts or invest more deeply in some efforts?*

As HSD continues to assess current contracting and new investment opportunities, the department will strategically assess its investment efforts based on community and constituent needs.

The department recognizes that some investments will take longer than a year to yield results. This is another reason why it is critical to set benchmarks and outcomes that will help monitor progress or the need for improvement in contracted programs. This process will also assist the department in determining if structural changes are needed to make improvements in contracted or new investment programs.

22. *Do you believe the department should continue to invest as it has or should the department invest mostly in new innovative strategies to address human needs?*

It is important for the department to be open to be engaged in new and innovative ways to address human needs and the delivery of human services. HSD will always seek to be a part of collaborative partnerships, using innovative strategies with other entities to meet the needs of the community's most vulnerable citizens. We will also seek partnerships with providers, local governments, foundations and other funders.

During my tenure with HSD, I will be focusing on opportunities to engage not only traditional human services agencies, but also grassroots providers. It has been my experience that this type of cross-pollination and collaboration fosters innovative strategies to serve people in need.

23. *The Committee to End Homelessness has established an investment or funding group that studies investments and then makes recommendations to the governing board. Do you believe such a structure should be established for the department?*

HSD has been a part of the CEH Funders Group since its inception and the early versions of the "Combined Notice of Funding Availability" were issued. This is a national model of funder collaboration and includes not only HSD and the Office of Housing, but other local government and private funders. The Funders Group is responsible for determining priorities, gathering appropriate fund sources, issuing the notice, and selecting recipients in a collaborative, coordinated way to help minimize duplicative work on the part of applicant agencies and ensure that programs are fully funded to address client needs. The Funders Group shares priorities and decisions to the Governing Board throughout this process. As I take the helm at HSD, I would like to explore how we can

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convene and collaborate more with funders addressing other areas such as early learning and youth programs. The department has strong relationships with the wealth of public and private funders in the area, and we should build on that to combine and stretch our funds as much as possible.

Again, please feel free to call me at 684-0111 if you have any questions concerning this submission.

Sincerely,

Dannette R. Smith, Acting Director
Seattle Human Services Department

cc: Mayor Michael Patrick McGinn
Council President Richard Conlin
Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Councilmember Tim Burgess
Councilmember Sally Clark
Councilmember Jean Godden
Councilmember Bruce Harrell
Councilmember Mike O'Brien
Councilmember Tom Rasmussen
Deputy Mayor Darryl Smith
Tim Killian, Mayor's Office