

CHFS Community
Leslie Hogue Hoffmann, Deputy Commissioner
Department for Medicaid Services (DMS)
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Secretary Eric Friedlander:

And I'm excited also about that mobile crisis piece. I think it is, I know I put pressure on everybody and I apologize, but there's so much that can change there. We have one response sometimes when somebody's acting out in community and there's so much more we can do rather than just one response.

Julianne Hatton:

Hello and welcome to CHFS Community, a podcast about health and wellbeing for CHFS employees across the commonwealth. Hosted by Secretary Eric Friedlander, broadcasting from Frankfort, Kentucky.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Hello, this is Eric Friedlander, Secretary of the Cabinet of Health and Family Services. And you're tuning in to another podcast. And today I have with me Leslie Hoffmann from Medicaid.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Hello. Pleasure to be here today.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

This is going to be fun. We've worked together a long time.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes, we have many, many years.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. It's been a minute. Were we in DAIL when I first started working with you? Where were you? Or were you always Medicaid and waiver program?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I worked for the Department of Behavioral Health-

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Ah, that's it.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

with acquired brain injury, and then we moved to Medicaid in '06 I believe.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Right. It has always been great to work with you because I could ask questions and get answers that were right, and it was very exciting. You grew up in Kentucky, is that right?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I did, Campbellsville.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's nice. What was it like growing up in Campbellsville?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

A couple of things. Campbellsville is, we consider ourselves the heart. We are approximately 80 miles from Bowling Green, 80 miles from Lexington, 80 miles from Louisville, and 80 miles from Frankfort, so we kind of consider our ourselves the heart. My county is Taylor County. We're a really small, close-knit community, full of natural beauty. We have our gorgeous Green River Lake State Park that we're very proud of. Our community is very much into beautification. We take a lot of ownership in our community and preservation of history, and we have a very well known historical downtown. Folks come to see our downtown a lot. As far as growing up, my dad owned and operated a Sears and Roebuck store for 29 years.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Wow.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

So since I was barely able to walk, I remember going down there with him to work, and I started working, probably helping out on the weekends when I was about 12. At 15 or 16 I started on the payroll, with the school's permission of course. So lots of memories related to that Sears and Roebuck store in the day. We were it. We sold everything to this small town. I remember lots of years of frontline service and the Cabbage Patch craze.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I remember going to Sears and Roebucks. Growing up in Louisville, there was a big one in Louisville. And folks who are almost as old as me can, because you give direction to where stuff used to be, so yeah, it's where the old Sears was.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes, yes. That's correct.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So you went to elementary, middle, high school in Campbellsville?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I went to, yes. I went to Campbellsville College. It was a college then not a university. And then went to Western for my master's. And I am back at Campbellsville University now working on my PhD.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Oh, congratulations. Congratulations. How's that going?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Tough. I decided to make a compliment to all of my health care and criminal justice degrees and add on business and leadership and management, combining that for a good joint educational path.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's really cool. Have you had that interest in learning, that excitement about learning your whole life?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I've always been interested in learning. I probably would've been a career student if my family path had not taken another direction. But I have managed to go back and forth many times. This is my last endeavor and kind of a personal path for my grandmother.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Oh, why is that?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

My grandmother was probably the matriarch of our family, at 4' 10." I was oftentimes probably more afraid of her than my parents. But she was wonderful and she was amazing. She was an educator and public speaker and she obtained her bachelor's degree, master's degree and worked on her PhD at a time that that was an absolute rarity for women. My grandfather was retired military and he was very supportive of what she wanted to do and he helped her all along the way to become what she wanted to be, and embed it in the grandchildren. There's four of us granddaughters and it was an expectation for us to be strong, independent women, to watch over our families and history and be educated, so that's where we are today. My grandmother was absolutely amazing and she comes from a long line of lineage all the way back to George Washington. I have a story. Can I share that with you?

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, yeah, please.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I think you'll like this one. Martha Washington, George Washington's wife, her mom's name was Francis, Francis Jones Dandridge. She owned a broach, handmade, beautiful antique broach for back in the day. And so every generation, a daughter or a granddaughter is named Francis. And that broach has been passed along since 1710.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Wow.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

When my grandmother, Anna Francis recently passed away, that broach was passed to me, which my birth certificate says Leslie Francis Hogue. Now, to put that in perspective, from 1710 to 2022, I'm next in line. It's mind boggling to me that you can keep that up for that long.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's amazing.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yeah, that's a pretty amazing story.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Wow. What a piece of history. That's fantastic.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

We were just in Blue Lick State Park and it was that last battle of the Revolutionary War was fought there.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So we have a lot of connections back to the Washington line. That's so cool.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

That's correct.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So you must have been a celebrity in your hometown.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

No. We've kept it fairly quiet. Now I'm telling it on a podcast.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Oh, well thank you. Thank you for sharing that. That is really cool. That's really cool.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yeah, it is.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

So you've done a lot of that heritage and-

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes, my grandmother served at a state level with Daughters of the American Revolution. I was actually president, or we called it regent, of our local chapter here for many years when I was younger, and have stayed involved with things like that through the past.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's very cool. That's very cool. You had this strong educational path. When did you start with the state?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Under Kentucky Retirement, I started out at a community mental health center when I was just a baby.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yes.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes. I worked for Communicare, which is out of the Elizabethtown area and it's a community mental health center. I spent one year in a PRTF, working for PRTF and then went on to Communicare.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

And you worked for Communicare for a bit and then you got enticed to come to the state, right?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I did. I did. Working for Communicare, sometimes I get emotional thinking about those beginning years, but I really started from the ground level. I've been a respite provider and a case manager and a crisis coordinator for members who have intellectual and developmental

disability and did all kinds of other jobs. Probably my favorite job in my entire career was case manager. I just loved that role. I've always just loved that role.

Sometime around '93 I wrote a grant for Supported Employment, which was one of the first in the state for members with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And within that path, I got to work with people who had brain injuries at vocational rehab. Not that they're in the same population, I'm just saying that I got to work with that population as well, and that's what drove my interest to come to the state. The state started a pilot project with a grant to see if we could utilize an acquired brain injury waiver here in Kentucky. And that's what drove me to coming to the state.

My years at Communicare, I will have to say, really, for lack of better words, raised me in a way that... Dan Simpson was the CEO there and he literally has been there for 48 years and just has recently retired. But he really taught us that we work for the member and that we need to respect and assist them to be as independent as possible and to live their best lives, whatever that means for us to do. And he believed in us. He would take... We felt green. At 21, I felt green. And he believed in what we were doing and would just say, "We've got to make this happen." And so it kind of led me to a situation that raised me in my work environment now, if that makes sense.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Because that means you're a public servant and I always like to say, it's a calling of its own.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

It is. And I love it. I do. I love my job. It's tough, but I love my job.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Well that's good. That's good. So what do you define as your leadership style?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Oh gosh. I believe that I'm no better than my team. I surround myself with good team members. We are all equal to the final decision. I don't believe that I have a better thought or the first thought that comes out. I feel like I'm just an equal partner in a multidisciplinary group, that we might have all levels. I want to hear from all levels, not just a particular, my executive level or anything like that. I want to hear from everybody. Everybody knows that the final decision might come from me, but I appreciate what people have to say and we all come at it at a different perspective. So me being on the provider side at one point and now working for the state, it helps me to understand the boots on the ground, respite, doing respite for members with intellectual disabilities who are in crisis. That makes me understand that piece better, I think.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Well, you got tapped for leading brain injury and then within Medicaid and you got to Medicaid and you kind of enjoyed that, right?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yeah. So at first, yeah, we were like, "Don't want to move. I like where I am." But then we were re-orged to the Department of Medicaid and then we were able to... I think the administration at that time allowed us to go ahead and start working on a long-term care brain injury waiver, which I believe that was Carrie Banahan was there at the time, and allowed us to go ahead and start working on that. That's still going. We wrote that years ago, and it's still going.

And then later my career led me to the assistant director, which I was over all the waivers and community mental health centers and hospice and things like that, and Money Follows the Person Program later. So just well rounded, I think.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Well and those are all such complex programs, too. And learning the complexities of Medicaid. And then you went back to Communicare for a little bit?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I did, as the Chief Disabilities Officer for a short time. I Even, you might not know this, I even left and went to Pebble Beach Golf Course in California for a year and worked there as a human resource director, coordinated the AT&T Golf Classic and the US Open 2000.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Wow. No, I did not know that.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yeah, you didn't know that.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I did not know that.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I didn't think you did. Just on the side. And you would find this funny, when I filled out my application, I went to Manpower and said, I'm here for a short time. What have you got? And I filled out an application and I put that I was a supported employment coordinator for people with intellectual disabilities and they hired me automatically as an employment coordinator for Pebble Beach Golf Course.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Was it fun? Did you enjoy it?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Oh gosh, yes. And I met so many... it was almost overwhelming every day the amount of movie stars and amazing people that were out there. And I had to be very professional and not treat anybody different. But yes, I met lots of folks while I was there for that year.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

But you wanted to come back?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I did. Yep, I did.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's good. That's good. But what fun?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes. It's a different beauty. Kentucky is beautiful. California is beautiful. It's a different beauty. I lived at Monterey Bay, 79 degrees all year round. I missed my seasons. I missed my flowers. I missed the leaves turning color. It's definitely a different beauty. And I did not miss the traffic. I don't miss the traffic at all.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That's good. Oh, I didn't know that. That's very cool. That's very cool. Home sickness brought you back? A job brought you back?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I just decided to return home, actually. My dad asked me to come back home and within a month I was pretty ready to come back. Came back, went right back to Communicare, soon as I got back, and that's when I was Chief Disabilities Officer. And then later left Communicare to come back to the state when there were some changes and they reached out to me and said, "We got this position, think you might be good for."

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

We're glad you're back. Glad you're back.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Thank you.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

There were some of us old timers that came back and, not that you're an old timer.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I'm getting there. I'm getting there.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

No, no, no. You've been working on some really important things. One of the things you're working on is race and health equity for Medicaid. I talk about that. Sometimes our systems are so big that even a little shift can make a big difference. How have you felt about doing that?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Sure. I'm proudly serving as Medicaid's Racial and Health Equity champion along with a wonderful team that we have. And I'm also assisting with, very proudly, that the state has now a newly established health disparity and equity tack, which is wonderful. I get lots of questions about that on the state and a federal level about what Kentucky's got going on here.

Really our vision is just to make sure that we're diverse and inclusive of all populations. And we've also been participating in another collaborative, partnering with other states, to learn about best practices and lessons learned. And we are all, the states that I'm working with, trying to gather some data. But really, right now Kentucky's in such a good spot to really make an opportunity to practice cultural humility and to empower some changes. We've really got the backbone and support to really start making some changes. But we've done smaller level things at Medicaid, really trying to focus on data driven policy and making changes anywhere we can and promoting that to our staff within, and our community presence of our own staff as well.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Well, and made some changes to the MCO contracts to include some diversity and equity language.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

That is correct.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I mean, that's giant.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes. Contracts, I've already included in contracts, policies, future RFP language, I've already added things like that, anywhere I can go ahead. All these different initiatives that we have right now related to mobile crisis and all of our amendments to our Team Kentucky 1115 will all include those requirements as well.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I'm excited also about that mobile crisis piece. I think it is, I know I put pressure on everybody and I apologize, but there's so much that can change there. We have one response sometimes

when somebody's acting out in community and there's so much more we can do rather than just one response. So it's a big deal. I appreciate all the work you've done on that.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Thank you.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Can talk a little bit about what that is? What services might be involved.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Sure. Mobile crisis is an absolutely amazing project. DMS and our other sister agencies were asked to plan and develop and now implement one all-inclusive Kentucky mobile crisis model for any Kentucky resident in crisis, regardless of age or gender or genetic orientation, ability to pay, it doesn't matter. We are going to serve everybody. We are promoting prevention and diversion, appropriate placements, better quality of life and outcomes. And that is absolutely amazing in the concept of serving the entire state.

We just completed a yearlong planning grant and now we're working towards the implementation. This model is absolutely unique. I've looked at five or six other models in other states, but none will compare to Kentucky's mobile crisis continuum.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

It's got a piece of transportation in it, so that your only option for even law enforcement isn't just taking somebody to jail. There are mobile crisis services so that somebody might not have to go to an emergency room but could get some services. It's really about how to get services to people.

It's such a game changer because we ask some of our law enforcement folks or emergency room folks to just be able to take care of everything. When somebody has a severe mental illness or has an issue with substances, that requires a totally different approach. And you're right, I don't think anybody's quite developed the way to respond and use Medicaid and other funds, but this is a game changer. At least I hope it is.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

It is. I love my job and I always like to have challenges. This has definitely been a challenge. DMS as well as our sister agencies, we were tasked with planning and the development and now implementing. I have not seen any other model that will match Kentucky's mobile continuum.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I think it's so exciting. Because I think the thing you just mentioned, what we're doing with health equity, particularly in the Medicaid space, is we maybe can do some other type of response than taking somebody to jail, right?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes. Yes. We're very much into prevention and diversion. Diversion for psychiatric hospitals, diversion from incarceration or confinement, and that goes along with DJJ and the youth who also get mixed up into the situations, children, but trying to serve everybody through this initiative. So we're very excited about this, and like you said, we're going to have to leverage all areas that CMS will allow us to to make this happen.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

All right. I think we've talked work long enough. What do you do at home? What are your past times? What's your favorite thing to do? How do you practice self-care? That's how I should ask that.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I do like to garden, but since school has taken over my life, that's been a little bit harder. Spending time with my family when I have the time. And my bulldogs have actually, my English bulldogs, have actually become, I feel like, my service dogs. I need them to calm down and to rest. I've always had a love of poetry. I love poetry. I like to memorize poetry. I like poetry that's more like ballads that tell stories. And I like a cadence that's rhyming for the most part. But that was just a past time. I actually started that probably in junior high. I had a wonderful teacher in junior high, that's still here in Campbellsville, Roberta Moore. She challenged me to memorize some poems, and that's where it all started right there, junior high.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Okay. There are so many things I wanted to ask there. I'm going to do it in this order. So English bulldogs, I love my dogs, too. That was plural. Do you breed them or are you just a lover of the breed?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Lover of the breed. I have rescued several in the past. I have one right now that I've raised from a baby that he will be 10 in May. I also have another one that's actually my oldest daughters that stays here with us most of the time. And then I also babysit. They're high maintenance, so they've got lots of issues. And I babysit for a gentleman that stays out of town a lot and I keep his bulldog as well.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Oh, that's really nice. Okay. When you garden, flowers or vegetables or both?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Both. I'm more into flowers though, probably. I love being outside, but I love to trim my own bushes and do my own gardening and things like that. I've always enjoyed that. It's the sun. I love being in the sun, for the most part. Not that that's a good thing. I just like being in the sun. I feel like it's healing. I've always felt like sun is healing.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Hope you wear appropriate sunscreen.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Yes, I do.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

My wife loved the sun too, but now they're cutting pieces off of her. Yeah. Anyway, so be careful in the sun. Okay. And you can say no, but do you have a poem that you'd like to recite?

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Oh. I like ballads that tell stories. And of course, I guess my favorite ballads are Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, those, or Robert Frost. I like some of his. But I really love... And Edgar Allan Poe, don't let me forget that one. I love Edgar Allan Poe. I really like nonsense verse a lot. Jabberwocky-

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Jabberwocky, yeah.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

by Lewis Carroll, that's probably one of my favorites.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

I know bits and pieces of all of those.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I may not say this exactly correct. Let's see. The Jabberwocky.

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe: all mimsy were the borogoves, the mome raths outgrabe.

Beware the Jabberwock, my son, the jaws that bite and the claws that catch. Beware the Jujub bird that shun the frumious Bandersnatch.

He took his vorpal sword in hand; long manxome foe he sought- and rested did he by a Tumtum tree, and stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood, the Jabberwock, with the eyes of flame, come whiffing through the tugley woods and burbled as it came.

One, two, one, two, one, two, through and through. And the vorpal sword went snicker-snack. And he left its head galumphing back.

Hast thou slain the Jabberwock, my Beamish boy? Oh, come into my arms, O frabjous day, Callooh, Callay as he chortled in his joy.

Twas brillig, in thy slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe. All mimsy wore a borogoves and the mome raths outgrabe.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

That was awesome.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

I started that in high school, junior high.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

My high school, in our drama class, we did a little, what would you call it? A short play to the Jabberwocky.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Oh. Yes, there's even a musical now.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, there is. That's right. That was fun. Thank you very much. This has been very fun for me.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Oh, good.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

And for the folks who listen, I hope-

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

That's what we have to do.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

it's been fun for you.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

We have to have fun, right? We do.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

We do. Thank you. Thank you for-

Leslie H. Hoffmann:

Thank you.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
brightening the day. I appreciate it.

Leslie H. Hoffmann:
Okay, thank you.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Bye.

Julianne Hatton:
Thanks for joining us on CHFS Community, hosted by Secretary Eric Friedlander, produced by Julianne Hatton. Our assistant producer is Beth Fisher. Our technical director and graphic artist is Lisa Wallace. Watch for the podcast preview in your email, so you'll never miss an episode. While you're at it, tell your coworkers about the show. Until next time, stay healthy, Kentucky.