

The Mayor's Office of Appointments (MOA) would like to wish you a Happy New Year! For more information about the office, please visit nyc.gov/appointments. If you are interested in working for NYC government, please visit on.nyc.gov/resumeportal to submit your resume to MOA's Resume Portal! Apply to serve on the Civic Engagement Commission [here!](#)

SITTING DOWN WITH: COMMISSIONER DAVID HANSELL



David Hansell is the Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). MOA sat down with Commissioner Hansell to discuss his career and his transformational work at ACS.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

Early in your career, you moved from the private sector to serving as the Deputy Executive Director at the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC). How did your experiences at GMHC shape the way you view public service and what effect did it have on your future career choices?

I arrived in New York in the early 1980s during the early stages of the AIDS epidemic. New York was one of the places that was hit hard and of course the gay community was hit the absolute hardest. Though it was not the work I expected to do when I first came to New York, I found that the issue was so pervasive that I had to do my part to tackle the crisis. I had the opportunity to go to GMHC and use my legal skills as the Director of Legal Services and later as the Deputy Executive Director engaging in broader advocacy and management work.

At GMHC, I worked to protect people from various kinds of discrimination they experienced because they had HIV. There was widespread discrimination against the gay community and communities of color. People were losing jobs, being denied insurance, and being kicked out of their homes. The government did not intervene to protect these communities so we at GMHC, along with other community members and advocates, took on the fight to supplement what was missing from the government response.

What I learned in those early years of the epidemic was just how important it is for the government to step in to protect vulnerable people who are unable to protect themselves. This was the most important lesson that I learned and it has stayed with me throughout my career. My work at ACS is along similar lines; our job is to protect vulnerable children and vulnerable young people who cannot protect themselves.

What skills did you learn and develop in your career that contributed to your development and success as a leader? Are there any activities or projects you participate in outside of work that have helped you grow in your career?

In my career, I've developed management skills that are transferable from one sector to another. Even if the focus is different, or the clients or programs are different, there are commonalities in effectively managing a large organization. For example, how you support your staff, cultivate and encourage people to do good work, work with stakeholders and external parties and work in complicated political environments. Those are all management skills I've learned over the course of my career that I hope make me a good Commissioner of ACS.

Along the way, I've also tried to stay involved in either board or volunteer capacities with other organizations that provide similar services to what I am working on full-time. For instance, I'm still involved with three organizations right now that work with children, the needs of low-income people, and advocate public policy: [New Yorkers for Children](#), [the American Public Human Services Association](#), and [the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington](#).

What are the most significant changes you've made at ACS and how did you choose which reforms to prioritize?

I was appointed Commissioner in 2017 during a critical time when there was heightened scrutiny at the agency following some high-profile fatalities and critical incidents in late 2016. I initiated a top-to-bottom review of our safety practices to identify ways in which we could be more effective and efficient in protecting children and families. In my first six months, I visited all our field offices across the city, met with thousands of frontline staff, and shadowed them in the field.

My core focus has been to make sure Child Protective Specialists (CPS), which are the agency's frontline staff, have the tools, training, and technology they need to do these incredibly difficult jobs. Over the last year, I'm proud to say that we've implemented dozens of critical reforms to strengthen ACS' protective and prevention work. For instance, we've strengthened accountability and quality improvement in the agency; strengthened investigations in our highest-risk cases; and worked more closely with other agencies and providers, including the Department of Education, Department of Homeless Services, and the NYPD.

In addition, we examined how best to strengthen our quality assurance work and increase our efficiency. We re-launched Child State and sought out new technological resources for the agency. We also nurtured stronger partnerships between ACS and other organizations in both the public and private sectors, because we alone can't protect children and families. We need strong partnerships and advocates working with us.

As Commissioner of ACS, what management techniques have you used to help your staff adapt to the changes you have implemented? What strategies do you employ to ensure that your frontline staff are provided the support they need?

As an effective leader, it's one of my top priorities to be accessible, visible, and reachable. I frequently meet with ACS employees who are part of the various teams and departments across the agency to hear what their needs are firsthand. As a result of those discussions, we have increased training for staff and added more than 1,100 new Child Protective Specialists.

In addition, we have significantly strengthened the technology within the agency. All the members of our frontline staff have been equipped with new Microsoft Pro Tablets. These tablets enable our staff to access critical information while out in the field and maintain timely documentation. This has provided CPS workers the capabilities to work on-the-go, helped to reduce caseloads, reduced overtime hours, and improved morale.

We have also provided CPS workers access to new software known as the Safe Measures Dashboard, which helps to organize their tasks and notes when they have to interview dozens of people for a single case. The Safe Measures dashboard helps busy staff members keep track of next steps and deadlines on all their active investigations and family service cases. We are intensely focused on the daily challenge of meeting the needs of NYC families, protecting NYC children, and supporting our staff.

What is your approach to crisis management at ACS and how do you maintain focus on the mission of your agency during times of stress?

As Commissioner, one of the successful ways to maintain focus on the mission of the agency is ensuring that employees have the support and well-being they need to successfully do their jobs. As we know, this work is tough and demanding and I encourage employees to take the time they need to get checkups, take a walk or run to clear their minds, and share meals with their families and loved ones. We have taken a number of concrete steps to improve conditions within the agency by developing wellness programs that provide employees a range of critical assistance.

It is true that much of the work that we do is very time sensitive. If there is a critical issue and a child is at risk, we have to make sure that we can respond as quickly as possible. Although we have long term plans in place with objectives and goals, we are also agile. If there is a crisis that requires our immediate response or intervention, we can be flexible in our responses so that we are able to solve the crisis quickly.

What advice would you give to up-and-coming leaders in City government who are transitioning to roles with greater management responsibility?

Find mentors. There are amazing people working in government at all levels and as you move up the ladder within government you can always find people at your level or above you who are willing to help you, give advice, mentor you, and support you. Don't hesitate to reach out and ask for it because you'll find if you do that it will be reciprocated.

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#LEADNYC

2018 was a great year for the Mayor's Office of Appointments (MOA) [LeadNYC Initiative](#)! During the year, MOA expanded LeadNYC to include a new citywide professional development program. This program provides New York City employees with interactive learning and networking opportunities for long-term success in public service. MOA organized large LeadNYC Leadership Panels like **A Seat at the Table: Women, Power, and Inclusion and Building Blocks of Effective Leadership**, which engaged senior City government leaders in dynamic dialogues about key workplace issues. MOA also introduced the LeadNYC Learning Series, which brought in experts to share organizational best practices and insights on career pathways. Learning Series programs included **Becoming a Chief of Staff** and **Mastering Difficult Conversations in the Workplace**. City employees across 85 agencies and mayoral offices participated and benefited from these events.

In addition to our professional development events, LeadNYC expanded its [Flash Mentorship program](#) in 2018. Flash Mentorship pairs senior government leaders with early career to mid-level City employees for one-time, one-hour mentoring sessions. Originally launched as a pilot program in 2017, Flash Mentorship grew to match over 600 employees in 2018. These mentor-mentee pairings provided an opportunity for mentees to discuss a wide range of topics including career advancement and professional development with their mentors.

Looking forward in the new year, we have exciting plans in store for City employees in 2019! MOA will continue to offer even more dynamic and inclusive programs to support the growth of City employees. Attendees can expect to learn about improving negotiation skills, best practices for how to run government programs, and participate in conversations on technology and data in the public sector. MOA will also host more opportunities for City employees to learn and network with each other across agencies and offices. You may learn more about MOA's LeadNYC Initiative and professional development programming by clicking [here](#) and you will find a gallery of our past events [here](#). MOA also plans to continue the expansion of the Flash Mentorship program for 2019. If you are a current New York City employee and you are interested in the program, please email mentorship@appointments.nyc.gov from your City agency email.



Boards and Commissions Highlights

The MOA Boards & Commissions (B&C) team is tasked with selecting candidates to serve on nearly 200 boards and commissions at both the City and State levels to represent the Mayor and the people of New York City. The team works closely with mayoral advisors, agency heads, and other key stakeholders to identify individuals to serve. B&C had quite an active year in 2018, successfully making over 300 appointments to individual seats on various advisory councils, boards, and commissions that affect the lives of all New Yorkers, including the City Charter Revision Commission, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and most recently the NYC Health + Hospitals Board of Directors.

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