



**Commission on Improving the
Status of Children in Indiana**

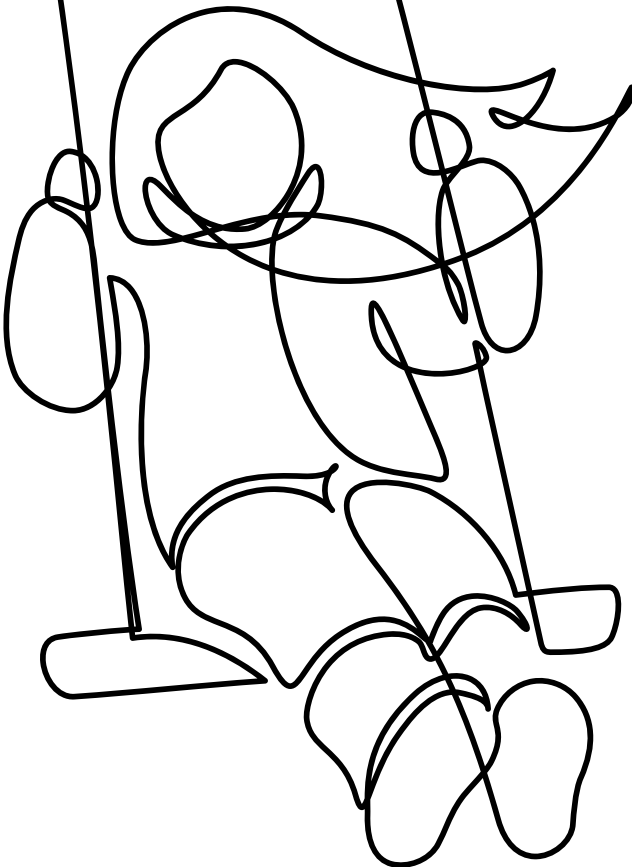


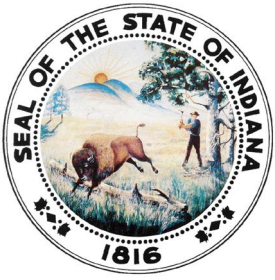
ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021

TABLE OF *contents*

Introduction	4
Commission actions	6
Getting it right for kids	8
Looking ahead	15
Commission Members	16
Task Force & Committee Members	19





Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

July 2021

Dear fellow Hoosier,

The year encompassing July 2020 through June 2021 will be remembered as a unique period in history.

With a global pandemic raging and vaccines becoming only toward the end of that period, a great deal of state business was conducted in a virtual environment for everyone's safety; so, too, with the Children's Commission. During this fiscal year, all Commission meetings were held online, with members participating from their various homes and offices and the public watching a livestream. Thankfully, technology allowed for the Commission to continue its vital work of studying issues and proposing policy and practice improvements for the benefit of vulnerable youth. While this year's report will be missing the colorful photographs of in-person meetings in beautiful and historic buildings, the work described here is no less substantive or important than in previous years.

The past year has also been one in which all eyes were on reckoning with historical injustices and building a more equitable society. Here too, state government did not miss the moment to act. During the year, the Governor's office, Family and Social Services Administration, and Indiana Supreme Court created and filled new equity-focused leadership positions. The Children's Commission's Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence Committee led the way in developing tools to assist with state government's efforts to keep striving for a more perfect union.

Although our state policy work continued relatively uninterrupted, we know the events of the past year had a profound impact on children and families, with those who were most disadvantaged prior to the pandemic bearing the brunt of both the health and economic fallout of COVID-19. Although schools and teachers performed an astonishingly fast and ef-

a year

like no other

fective pivot to online learning when needed for safety, spring test scores showed that—as predicted—students lost academic ground due to disruptions to the learning environment over the past year. Youth anxiety and depression are at all-time highs because of the isolation of this pandemic year, and food insecurity remains a problem throughout the state. As Indiana emerges from the shadow of COVID-19, much work lies ahead to recover and rebuild—minds, hearts, homes, and stomachs. The Commission will be keeping an eye out for policy and practice innovations that can accelerate that recovery for children and families and lead us to a place that is even better than before.

One reason to hope our ideas will continue to get better is that the voices of youth are being brought more deliberately and consistently into the conversation. With the passage this year of HEA 1537, the Commission on Improving the Status of Children will add two young adults who have been in the position of the youth who are the focus of the Commission. Adding the perspectives and experience of youth to those of our policy leaders is a formula for cooking up new and better solutions for Hoosier children and families, and I can't wait to get started.



For the Children,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Julie L. Whitman". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Julie L. Whitman, MSW
Executive Director

COMMISSION *actions*

Met during the fiscal year

Commission met in August, October, December, April, and June

Executive Committee met in August, September, October, December, January, March, April, May, and June

Adopted

Position statement on appropriate uses of the Adverse Childhood Experiences questionnaire

Equity guide for policy analysis

Organizational equity resource packet

Equity curriculum and training resource guide

New strategic objective on screening, identification, and treatment of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

Screen shot from Virtual Youth Engagement Summit (YES!)

Approved

Letter of support for Youth Risk Behavior Survey administration

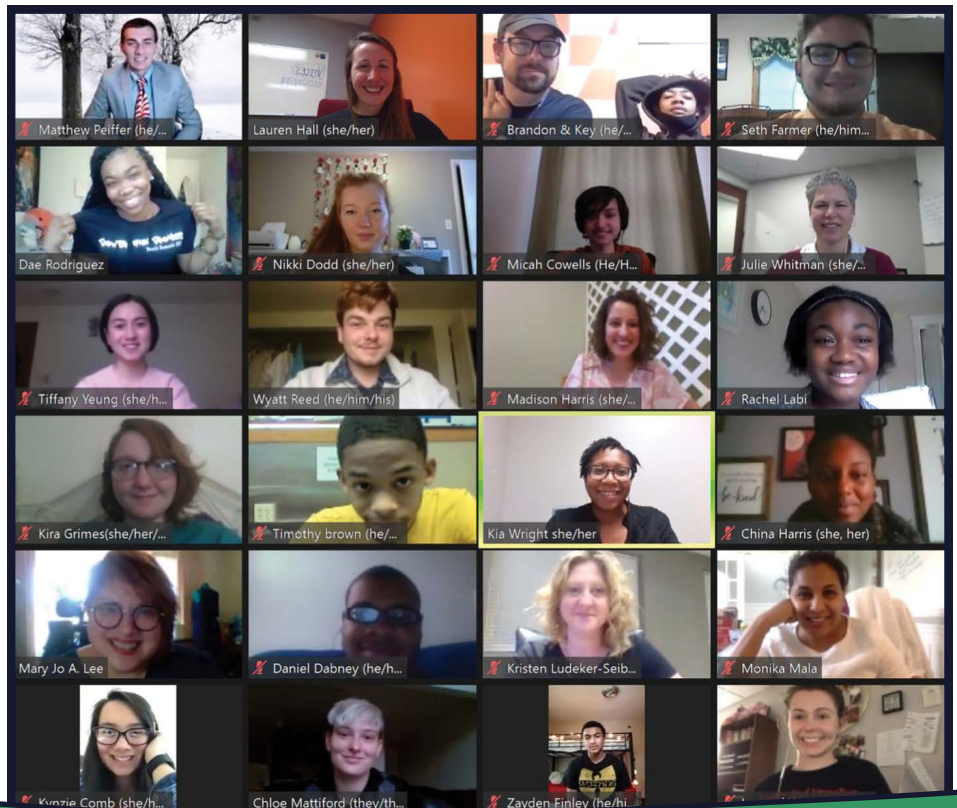
Recommendations to change clinical addiction counselor licensing requirements to improve the ability for mental health providers to also acquire an addiction treatment license; **enacted in HEA 1468**

Concept of adding two youth members to the Commission; **enacted in HEA 1537**

Recommendation to require suicide prevention training in certain postsecondary programs for health, education, and mental health professionals

Recommendation to require schools selected by the CDC to participate in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Recommendations to increase awareness of emergency shelter care facilities and how they can be used



STATE FISCAL YEAR: JULY 1, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2021

Recommendations to enhance foster care capacity to care for older youth through specialized recruitment and training

Recommendation to provide specialized training to emergency shelter care facilities on working with high-need youth

Recommendation to end the 90-day waiting period to enroll in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) after dropping private insurance

Endorsed

Creation of a coordinated crisis response network for the state of Indiana

The prioritization of mental health programs, awareness, and suicide prevention across all three branches of state government

Development of Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) as a pilot with a Medicaid managed care entity

Tracked & reported on

262 bills, which resulted in 60 new laws impacting children

Hosted or planned events with partners

Virtual Youth Engagement Summit (YES!)

Virtual State of the Child 2021

Heard presentations on

Creating a vulnerable youth dashboard

Child fatality review findings on youth suicide

Ways to engage youth at risk of suicide in treatment

Efforts to support kinship caregivers and raise awareness of their role

The development of a statewide framework for preventing child maltreatment

Social emotional learning and mental health resources for schools

Recent data on infant mortality in Indiana

Children's mental health promotion and addiction prevention programs and best practices

Findings and recommendations from a preliminary assessment of Indiana's juvenile justice system

Definition of serious and violent delinquent behavior and steps toward prevention recommendations

Strengthening Indiana Families program and Family Resource Centers

Authentic youth participation

GETTING IT RIGHT *for kids*

The Commission's current strategic plan highlights five overarching principles, each of which represents one way of "getting it right for kids." If we incorporate these principles into our work, it can only improve the results. Here we highlight significant Commission accomplishments of this past fiscal year that align with the overarching principles.



EQUITY

Historical inequities cannot be corrected by ignoring them. For statewide solutions to be effective, marginalized voices must be included, data must be disaggregated (by race, geography, gender and other relevant variables) and policies and programs must be responsive to the particular needs and strengths of each community and group of children in Indiana.

Equity policy analysis guide

This guide, developed and presented by the Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence Committee (EICC), contains a set of seven questions for policymakers to ask themselves before enacting a new policy, or when reviewing an existing one. This guide has been distributed broadly and serves as inspiration for local entities—for example within the youth justice system—as they work to complete racial equity impact assessments on local policies and practices. The guide has been presented to national audiences as well, including federal officials and state and local children’s cabinets from around the country.

Organizational equity resource packet

This set of resources includes a sample job description for a Chief Equity Officer or similar position, a list of organizational protective factors that promote an equitable environ-

ment, and resources for conducting an organizational self-assessment to determine readiness to take on equity work. With many organizations and agencies committing to a renewed focus on equity, the EICC and the Commission took the opportunity to provide these tools to help that work be authentic and successful.

Curriculum & training resource guide

Many leaders recognize a need to train their staff—and themselves—on topics related to equity, such as implicit bias, disproportionality, and inclusion. This list of training and educational resources is a starting place where individuals can begin or continue their own learning and that of their organization. The curriculum subcommittee of the EICC developed a rubric and scored available resources, resulting in this vetted list of training opportunities.

TWO GENERATIONS

Parents are children's first teachers and role models. Efforts to support the safety, health, wellbeing, and education of children and youth are more effective when those efforts also support the role of parents and extended family members in the child's development.

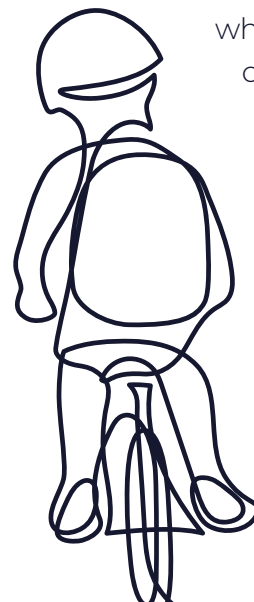
Child abuse prevention framework

Pursuant to a recommendation from the Child Health and Safety Committee that the Commission approved in May 2019, a group of statewide stakeholders has been working with the Department of Child Services (DCS) and a consulting group to develop a statewide framework for the prevention of child maltreatment. Such primary prevention work prioritizes supporting families and connecting them with resources in their communities. Additionally, the Commission has served as a partner on Strengthening Indiana Families, a federally funded project led by two Indiana University professors to develop Family Resource Centers in four pilot counties. Both of these projects prioritize supporting parents in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children.



Mental health & substance abuse workforce

Addiction has been referred to as an epidemic in Indiana, and parental addiction is one of the top factors negatively impacting children's safety and wellbeing. The Commission's Mental Health and Substance Abuse task force took on the challenge of seeking ways to increase the number of qualified treatment providers in Indiana, so that parents and families can receive the support they need to enter recovery and be fully present and capable for their children. The task force proposed a set of changes to the licensing requirements for clinical addictions counselors, which were enacted in HEA 1468. These new requirements will streamline licensing for those who hold or are simultaneously pursuing another mental health license, such as the LCSW, ultimately producing more qualified treatment providers to help families reach stability and wellness.



DO NO HARM

The state should only intervene in the life of a child or family if the intervention can reasonably be expected to improve the status of the child and/or family. Government intervention should not cause harm.

Emergency shelter care recommendations

The Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth task force decided to take a close look at how emergency shelter care facilities were being used, and could be used, in Indiana. They found that these safety net facilities were generally about half full, with room to take more youth as needed. However, there was not always a good match between the needs of the youth and the services available—with high-need youth sometimes being turned away, and youth that could be served in foster families being housed in facilities instead. There could also be geographical mismatch, as local stakeholders were not necessarily aware of the availability of services outside their immediate area if their facility was full.

The shelter care subcommittee proposed a number of recommendations to help raise awareness of the availability of shelter care, including for daytime use; to do specialized training and recruitment of foster families to serve older youth (those most likely to enter facilities when they could be served by families instead); and to provide additional training to shelter care facilities on serving high-need

youth (those who are sometimes turned away from the facilities due to behavior concerns, but who most need the help that could be provided there).

Mobile response & stabilization services

The Mental Health and Substance Abuse task force's subcommittee on mobile response has been studying the benefits of creating a system of mobile response for youth experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis, as a safer alternative to the use of emergency departments or law enforcement. The subcommittee visited other states, combed through Medicaid data, and found that the use of a mobile behavioral health response has the potential to reduce disruption in foster care placements, reduce expensive emergency department visits, and produce better outcomes for youth. This group proposed working with the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning to take an even deeper dive into the data while engaging one of the Medicaid Managed Care Entities (MCE) to develop a pilot mobile response program. The team also identified the availability of federal technical assistance that could help with this effort.

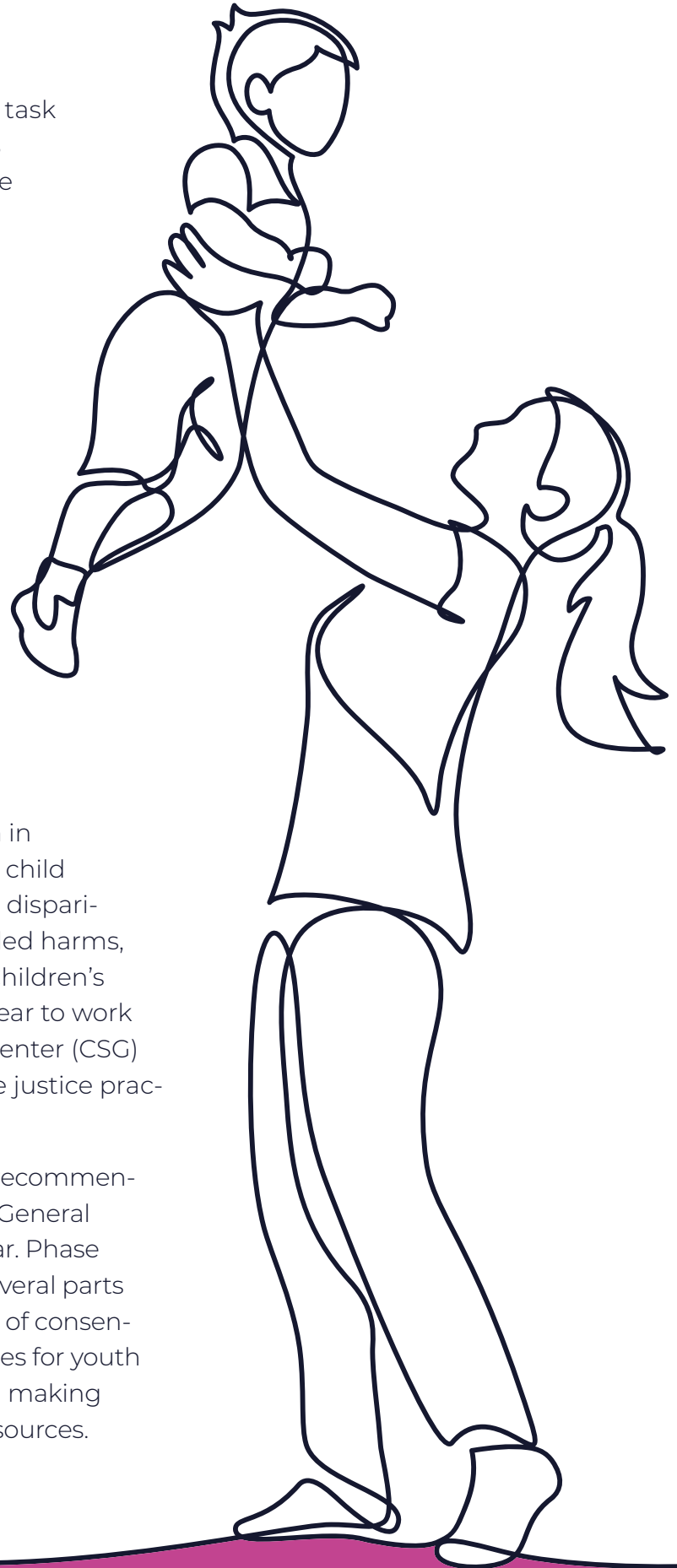
CHIP waiting period

A subcommittee of the Child Health and Safety task force started taking a close look at state actions that could help ensure health coverage for more children. The subcommittee discovered a relatively simple change that could be made administratively by FSSA to ensure that children whose parents' employer-provided coverage becomes too expensive would not have to wait before enrolling in the Children's Health Insurance Program. They recommended changing the rule currently in place that forces a 90-day period of no coverage on those children, which can delay necessary care.

Juvenile justice system assessment

Decades of research have shown that involvement in the juvenile justice system can have a serious negative impact on a child's future, often in a way that is out of proportion to the offense the child may have committed, and with significant racial disparities. In an effort to gain clarity on these unintended harms, while maintaining a focus on public safety, the Children's Commission sought and received funding this year to work with the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG) on a preliminary assessment of Indiana's juvenile justice practices and outcomes.

CSG presented a set of preliminary findings and recommendations, and the Commission was funded by the General Assembly to continue the work in the coming year. Phase two will include a deep dive into the data from several parts of the youth justice system and the development of consensus-based recommendations to improve outcomes for youth while maintaining or improving public safety and making responsible use of state and local government resources.



TRAUMA-INFORMED

An understanding of the impact of trauma and trauma-informed practice increases the effectiveness of all work with vulnerable children and families.

ACEs position statement

The Child Trauma and Resilience Committee has worked to thread together the many different conversations taking place across Indiana about child trauma and appropriate ways to respond. Several members of the committee were trained by Dr. Robert Anda, an original author of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study, on the proper use of ACEs information to build trauma-informed communities.

As knowledge of ACEs has grown, so too have the number of people and programs who have begun to use the ACEs questions in ways not originally intended. The committee developed a position statement, which the Commission adopted, on appropriate and inappropriate uses of the sensitive ACEs questions with children, youth, and adults. The committee continues work on a follow-up resource with suggestions for alternative measures to use in situations where the ACEs questions are not the most appropriate tool.

Social-emotional learning, mental health promotion & addiction prevention in schools

The Commission heard several presentations this year on evidence-based and trauma-informed practices that help students succeed in school and life. Through the work of the Indiana Department of Education, the Division of Mental Health and Addiction, and private funders such as the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, Indiana children and youth are learning skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

These skills, when taught regularly and with fidelity to a research- or evidence-based program, serve as a foundation not only for academic success, but also future workforce readiness. These programs are helpful for all students, but carry additional benefits in giving teachers ways to support students who have experienced trauma, and prevent that trauma from interfering with the student's learning.

YOUTH & FAMILY VOICE

All solutions are more effective if those who are expected to benefit from them participate in the process of developing them.

YES! fellowship & summit

With support from the Forum for Youth Investment, the Commission partnered this year with Voices Corporation and a planning team of professionals and parents to select and train a group of youth fellows, who planned and led a virtual policy summit. The youth fellows ranged in age from 15 to 23 and had experience with many of the state systems represented on the Children's Commission. Voices provided an eight-week training process that prepared the youth to turn their

own experiences into education and advocacy, and in October 2020, the youth planned and led a virtual summit for more than 250 policy makers and youth-serving professionals. During the summit the youth presented on the topics of educational inequity, homelessness, mental health, and child welfare. The youth presented their ideas for making these systems better, and following the summit they engaged directly with legislators and others to speak into the policy process from their experience.

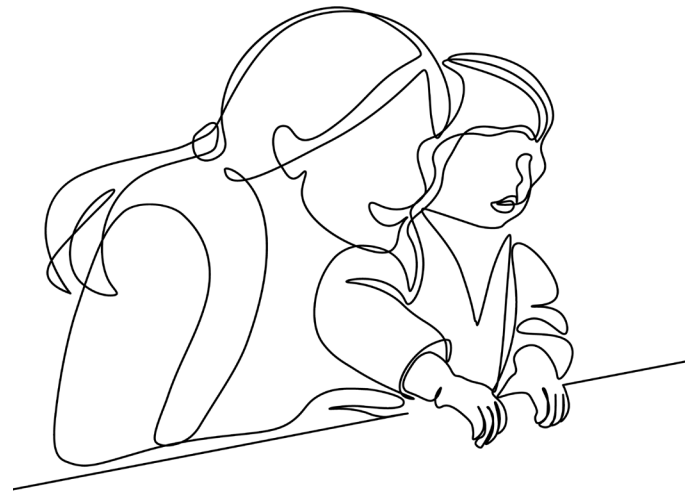


Youth Commission members

The YES! fellowship and summit inspired Commission members to embrace the value of having youth at the table, and after a discussion with the full Commission, HB 1537 was filed and ultimately passed and became law. The act creates two additional seats on the Children's Commission for young adults who, as children, have been served by the systems present on the Commission. At the end of the fiscal year, finalists were being interviewed for the positions, and appointments are expected early in the next fiscal year.

Family YES! planning

With support from Casey Family Programs, Commission staff is working with a committee of professionals and parents to plan a family and youth engagement summit (Family YES!), where youth as well as parents can share their experiences with state systems and professional services, and exchange ideas with professionals on how to improve these systems and services and make them more family-friendly. This summit was originally scheduled for 2020, but due to the pandemic and the committee's strong desire to hold the event in person, it has been postponed to Fall 2021. Much of the planning and groundwork was laid during the 2020-21 fiscal year.



LOOKING
ahead

The Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana has just completed its eighth year of collaborating to improve policies and practices for vulnerable youth. So much more remains to be done.

In the coming year, the Commission will dive more deeply into juvenile justice reform, continue pressing forward on ways to support families to prevent child abuse and neglect, continue to seek increased availability of evidence-based mental health and substance abuse treatment for children and their parents, and seek new community collaborations to help keep our youngest children healthy and our adolescents safe from violence.

We will continue to speak up for the need to inform our responses to these problems with an understanding of equity, trauma, and a public health response. Working together **for** and **with** our youth, there is nothing we can't take on. We are Hoosiers. Bring it on.

COMMISSION *members*



Christine Blessinger

Deputy Commissioner,
Re-entry and Youth Services,
Indiana Department of
Correction



Representative Dale DeVon

State Representative, District 5

2020 Commission Chair
Member, Executive Committee



Kristina Box, M.D.

Indiana State Health
Commissioner



Senator Stacey Donato

State Senator, District 18

Member, Executive Committee



Senator Jean D. Breaux

State Senator, District 34



Justin Forkner

Chief Administrative Officer,
Indiana Supreme Court



Jay Chaudhary

Director, Division of Mental
Health and Addiction, Family and
Social Services Administration



John R. Hammond, IV

Deputy Chief of Staff,
Office of the Governor

2021 Commission Chair
Member, Executive Committee



Bernice Corley

Executive Director,
Indiana Public Defender Council



Curtis T. Hill, Jr.

Indiana Attorney General

(Member through December 2020)



Zac Jackson
Indiana State Budget Director



Todd Rokita
Indiana Attorney General
(Member starting January 2021)



Katie Jenner, Ed. D.
Secretary of Education
(Member starting January 2021)



Honorable Loretta Rush
Chief Justice of Indiana
2022 Commission Chair
Member, Executive Committee



Susan Lightfoot
Chief Probation Officer,
Henry County Probation
Department



Terry Stigdon
Director, Department of Child
Services
Member, Executive Committee



Jennifer McCormick, Ph.D.
Indiana Superintendent of Public
Instruction
(Member through December 2020)



Jennifer Sullivan, M.D.
Secretary, Family and Social
Services Administration



Chris Naylor
Executive Director, Indiana
Prosecuting Attorneys Council



Representative Vanessa Summers
State Representative, District 99
Member, Executive Committee



(L-R) Dr. Jennifer Sullivan, Dr. Kris Box, and Terry Stigdon.

Commission Members Lead State's Pandemic Response

As Indiana's Health Commissioner, **Dr. Box** provided tireless and inspiring leadership for the state's public health pandemic response, while continuing to attend to all of the other priorities of IDOH, including reducing infant mortality and narrowing racial disparities in infant and maternal health.

As Secretary of FSSA, **Dr. Sullivan** took the lead on ensuring a compassionate and efficient response during COVID to those who were experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, mental health challenges, and food insecurity.

Terry Stigdon, DCS director and nurse by training, ensured that vulnerable children and families continued to be served remotely or in person as needed, while also finding time to volunteer in her nursing capacity to assist with COVID testing.

That all three leaders continued their important work for children and families while also leading their teams through an extraordinary year-long (and counting) public health emergency is a testament to the Hoosier spirit of compassion, hard work, and dedication that all three embody.

TASK FORCE & COMMITTEE *members*

Child Health & Safety Task Force

Sarah Sailors, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Child Services

Sen. Jon Ford, Co-Chair
District 38

Ben Brown
FSSA/Office of Medicaid Policy & Planning

Christina Commons
FSSA/First Steps

Chris Daley
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Kristen Dauss, MD
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Mark Fairchild
Covering Kids & Families of Indiana

Rachel Fisher
Lutherwood

Maureen Greer
Indiana Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative

Terri Lee
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Sharon Pierce
The Villages

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Office of Court Services, Indiana Supreme Court

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SCAN, Inc.

Educational Outcomes Task Force

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Brianna Morse, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Workforce Development

Mary Beth Buzzard
Indiana Department of Correction

Shannon Chambers
Johnson County Probation

Michael Coleman
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Bethany Ecklor
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Melaina Gant
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JauNae Hanger
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Indiana

Susan Lightfoot
Henry County Probation

Janet Martinez
Marion County Public Defender
Agency

Terri Miller, PhD
Boone Hamilton Madison Special
Services

Teresa Ochoa, PhD
Indiana University

Susan Roberts, EdD
Nexus Point Consulting

Anita Silverman, EdD
Transitions Academy

Alison Slatter
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Educators

Gil Smith
Department of Child Services

Lisa Truitt
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Gina Woodward
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Juvenile Justice & Cross-Systems Youth Task Force

Hon. Steve Galvin, Co-Chair
Monroe Circuit Court

Nancy Wever, Co-Chair
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Alternatives Initiative

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Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council

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District 76

Sen. Mike Crider, Co-Chair
District 28

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Parri Black
Youth First, Inc.

Sirrilla Blackmon
FSSA/Division of Mental Health and
Addiction

Hon. Jason Cichowicz
St. Joseph Probate Court

Alison Cox
Porter County Juvenile Detention

Hon. Steve David
Indiana Supreme Court

Katy Elmer
Evansville-Vanderburgh School
Corporation

James Garrett, Jr.
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Status of Black Males

Hon. Dana Kenworthy
Grant Superior Court 2

Hon. Kenton Kiracofe
Wells Circuit Court

Susan Lightfoot
Henry County Probation

Chase Lyday
Avon Community School Corporation
Police

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Notre Dame Law School

Chris Naylor
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Improvement Program

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Porter County Sheriff

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Indianapolis Urban League

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MSD of Warren Township

Don Travis
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Lisa Truitt
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Steve McCaffrey
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Jason Murrey
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**Gabriela Marie Rodriguez, PhD,
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Indiana University School of Medicine

Ty Rowilson
Choices Coordinated Care Solutions

**Jennifer Tackitt-Dorfmeier,
LCSW, CYC-P**
Choices Coordinated Care Solutions

Nancy Wever
Indiana Office of Court Services

Meribeth Adams Wolf
Our Place Drug and Alcohol Education
Services, Inc.

Child Trauma & Resilience Committee

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Indiana University School of Medicine

Amber Becker, Co-Chair
FSSA/Division of Mental Health and
Addiction

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JauNae Hanger
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Laura Mobley
Traders Point Christian Church

Heidi Monroe
Indiana Department of Child Services

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Allen Superior Court

Lindsay Hill Stawick
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David Westenberger
Indiana Youth Services Association

Child Services Oversight Committee

Rep. Ed Clere, Chair
District 72

Leslie Dunn
Indiana Office of Court Services

Sen. Jon Ford
District 38

Rep. Carolyn Jackson
District 1

Hon. Dana Kenworthy
Grant Superior Court

Sean McCrindle
Bashor Children's Home

Michael Moore
Indiana Public Defender Council

Sen. Frank Mrvan
District 1

Jim Oliver
Prosecuting Attorneys Council

Terry Stigdon
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Jeff Wittman
Department of Education

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Zachary Osowski, Co-Chair
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Indiana Public Defender Council

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Indiana Department of Correction

Ron Galaviz
Indiana State Police

Ben Gavelek
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Jim Gavin
Indiana Family and Social Services Administration

Michele Holtkamp
Office of the Governor

Holly Lawson
Indiana Department of Education

Bill McCleery
Office of the Attorney General

Erin Murphy
Indiana Department of Child Services

Jennifer O'Malley
Indiana State Department of Health

Holly Stachler
Indiana Department of Education

Allison Vanatsky
Indiana General Assembly

Data Sharing & Mapping Committee

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Tyler Brown, Co-Chair
Management Performance Hub

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Michael Commons
Indiana Office of Court Services

Josie Fasoldt
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Jeff Milkey
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Christine Reynolds
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Lisa Thompson
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Chris Yirenyi
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Child Advocates

Tashi Teuschler, Co-Chair
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Kenneth Allen
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Tarrell Barry
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Rhonda Bayless
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Erin Busk
Indiana Department of Education

Valerie Davidson
Meridian Diversity Consulting

Ellis Dumas III
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Carol Franklin
Phoenix Family and Community Services

Brenda Graves-Croom
FSSA/Division of Mental Health and Addiction

Gurinder Hohl
Immigrant Welcome Center

Timike Jones
Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Manpreet Kaur
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Esther Lewis
Holistic Evolution, Inc.

George Middleton
The George Middleton Group

Tim Nation
Peace Learning Center

Chris Paulsen
Indiana Youth Group

Shirley Payne
Indiana State Department of Health

Lun Pieper
Indiana Office of Court Services

Guadalupe Pimentel Solano
Central Indiana Community Foundation

Adam Pitt
Indiana Department of Education

Calvin Roberson
Indiana Minority Health Coalition

Mark Russell
Indianapolis Urban League

Meghan Smith
FSSA/First Steps

Jessica Strong
Hamilton Center

Latrece Thompson
Indiana Department of Child Services

Jessica Tomasino
FSSA/First Steps

Adrian Warren
Radio One



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