

Celebrating 10 Years!



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Annual Report

July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

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Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Dear fellow Hoosier,

2022-2023 was a pivotal time for Indiana's children as we emerged from the global pandemic with many lessons learned and a better understanding than ever of their needs. While many understandably sought a "return to normal," the Hoosier state also saw opportunities to act. Our state agencies, judicial system, and legislature looked for new and novel approaches to improve child well-being, while also examining current shortfalls within our systems. As a conduit for information and resources across the three branches of Indiana government, the Commission on Improving the Status of Children was involved in these efforts wherever possible.

Entering its tenth year, the Commission on Improving the Status of Children began the next phase of its vision to ensure every child in Indiana has a safe and nurturing environment and is afforded opportunities to reach their full potential. This took the form of integrating the lived experiences of those previously served by state systems. Key to this approach were the contributions of the Commission's first Youth Representative members, Dejana Rodriguez and Stephaney Knight, who provided invaluable insights throughout the year.

Other efforts of the Commission in 2022-2023 include supporting the work of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee and supporting legislation to increase access to health coverage and to remove barriers to college enrollment. Additionally, a strategic investment by the Indiana legislature was made to directly fund the Commission, allowing for future expansion and additional capacity to meet its mission.

Finally, the Commission's first Executive Director, Julie Whitman, transitioned to a new opportunity after 5 years of dedicated service. The Commission completed an exhaustive search for her successor, hoping to build the next phase of the Commission on the strong foundation that Julie laid. We dedicate this report to her service, and to the service of all that contributed to our first decade of creating a better Indiana for all our children.



For the children,

Mark A Fairchild, MSW
Executive Director

Commission Actions

State Fiscal Year: July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

Meetings Held

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

Executive Committee met in August, September, October, November, December, February, March, and May

Approved

3 Violence Prevention Models researched and presented by the Juvenile Justice and Cross System Youth Task Force

2023-2025 Commission Strategic plan, operational plan, roles/responsibilities, and Youth Engagement Plan

Hiring of new Executive Director, Mark Fairchild

Selection of two new Youth Representatives

Recommended

Removal of the CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) 90-day enrollment waiting period for prior coverage

Removal of the 5-year waiting period for lawfully residing immigrant children and pregnant women for Medicaid and CHIP enrollment

To support 21st Century Scholar program auto-enrollment

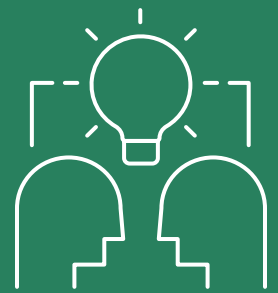


Highlights

With input from nearly 300 Task Force, Committee, and Subcommittee members from around the state, the Children's Commission made significant progress this year in several areas. Below are just a few of the past year's results and works in progress.

FAMILY & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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



Inaugural Youth Representatives Reflect

In July of 2021, the Commission welcomed two young adults with previous experience in foster care and residential treatment as its newest members. Dejana Rodriguez and Stephaney Knight soon became known as the most important voices on the Commission, always willing to provide insightful questions and impactful reflections to the table. Read on for their reflections on two years with the Commission.

“In July of 2021, I had the honor of being appointed to serve a term as one of the very first youths to ever sit on the Commission. As I reflect on the past two years, to say I have learned so much is an understatement. Throughout this time, I was able to use my lived experience with foster care, residential treatment facilities, and juvenile to provide a unique and valuable perspective than what the Commission was used to having. From day one I have felt nothing but acceptance and gratitude from the other members. That meant the

world to me because it was not easy to transition from once being one of the very same vulnerable youths that CISC was created to serve...to being a member that helped create and discuss solutions to make a difference on their behalf. At a point in time because of my experience, I was considered a statistic and was chastised when I tried to speak up for myself.

Being a part of CISC gave a different type of power and purpose to my voice that I will always use and never forget! Having direct access to systems,

data, and resources helped me gain more confidence in my approach. I was able to see first-hand the amazing possibilities that can occur when you have multiple parties all working towards the same goal and the equal representation of everyone involved to do so. This was a life-changing opportunity for me, and I will forever be grateful that I was able to be a part of something so meaningful. I am excited to see the Commission work together and continue to engage the community on behalf of our vulnerable children. May we all remember that the children are our future, and they deserve all hands-on deck!”

- Dejuna Rodriguez

“It has been an honor to have worked alongside the Commission on Improving the Status of Children for the past two years. When I was chosen to be one of the first youth members, I was shocked but also excited. This was a huge step for me in my advocacy journey and my healing journey. I remember at my first Commission meeting how nervous I was. I was surrounded by some powerful and influential people. One thing the Commission did very well, was making me feel welcomed

and as an equal. They made me feel comfortable and made it known that they wanted to hear my ideas, and that my ideas and opinions were of value. Youth engagement has come a long way in our state, especially with the Commission. They have made a huge effort, not only with bringing Dejuna and I on board, but also with trying to bring youth on the Task Forces and Subcommittees.

I have gained new knowledge and insight from my two years serving on the Commission on how people come together to help improve children and youth’s lives across the state, and how it can be very difficult to change like a laws or policies, especially when funding is involved. I am excited for the two new youth to come on board and am looking forward to their insights and ideas that will help and guide the Commission.”

- Stephaney Knight

Family and Youth Engagement Plan

At its February 2023 meeting, the Commission approved a recommendation involving the importance of continuing to engage those with lived experience in state systems. As the terms for the Commission’s first youth representatives ended this year, it was crucial to reiterate the benefits of this inclusion.

During the creation of the new Strategic Plan, Commission and Task Force/Committee members unanimously voiced support for enhancing lived experience voices. Hearing from young adults earlier and more often in the Commission process prompted the inclusion of the first young adult on a Task Force. The Commission hopes to populate each Task Force and Committee with an individual with lived experience in the next year. The plan also encouraged increasing the presence of parent and family voices by potentially adding a member to the Commission, incorporating their voices into Task Force and Committee discussions, and including them as active participants in other Commission activities. By directly involving parents and families, all actions and recommendations initiated by the Commission will be stronger and better informed.

This will be reflected in future iterations of the Commission's Family and Youth Engagement Summit. The goal is for the event to continuously grow and build on past efforts, ensuring that a meaningful public forum exists for this integral topic and acting as an incubator for new ideas.

The Commission will expand contracting with youth and parents with lived experience not only as summit speakers, but also as primary event planners and consultants. Continuing as a no-cost and completely virtual event, it will be more broadly marketed to stakeholders,

community members, family, and youth looking for ways to elevate and amplify lived experience voices across the state. The Commission thanks Casey Family Programs for its support in planning and executing this event.

YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM

Since its inception, the Children's Commission has had an interest in better serving those youth who become involved in the justice system, particularly if they have also interacted with other state systems. That continuous improvement effort continued this year under the guidance of two different Commission Task Forces.



Juvenile Justice & Cross-System Youth Task Force

The Juvenile Violence Subcommittee of the Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth Task Force compiled Indiana data surrounding serious and violent delinquent behavior. The Task Force found that youth of color are found guilty or adjudicated at significantly higher rates, and there is no statewide framework for juvenile violence prevention. After looking deeper into 22 different models, the Commission approved three

violence prevention initiatives: Cure Violence, Project BUILD, and Credible Messengers for Justice Involved Youth.

Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force

The Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force was created by the Commission in February 2020 to work on a statewide juvenile justice system assessment. That work continued in Fiscal Year 2021-22, culminating in a set of juvenile justice reform recommendations, which were endorsed by the Commission

in December 2021. Those recommendations became the substance of House Enrolled Act 1359-2022.

That Act directs the Commission to create an oversight body to implement the items laid out in the legislation. The Youth Justice Oversight Committee held its first meeting on June 29, 2022, and crafted a final report released in late 2023. The Commission will now continue to support the work of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee as it moves towards implementing its recommendations and launching a set of grant opportunities statewide.

MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH

Data has shown Indiana to be lagging in many key indicators of maternal and child health. Many of these were found to correlate directly to the access to quality health care services, often compounded by a lack of healthcare coverage.



The Child Health and Safety Task Force continued efforts to remove the 90-day waiting period for children with prior coverage transitioning to the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Policy change occurred at the end of the pandemic, closing this coverage gap.

Another recommendation was to eliminate the 5-year waiting period for lawfully residing immigrant children and pregnant women to access the CHIP and Medicaid programs. This prolonged waiting period created a possibility for some children to receive virtually no preventative care during that period, and for expectant mothers to be at risk for complications due to a lack of prenatal care. The Commission endorsed a recommendation to end the waiting period, with Commission Chair Stacey Donato authoring successful legislation to do so.



Looking Ahead

So much has occurred during the first decade of the Children's Commission, but a tremendous amount of work lies ahead.

Granted dedicated funding by the Indiana General Assembly, the Commission will be hiring an additional staff position, expanding opportunities for

youth engagement, and adding more voices of those with lived experiences to our efforts. The Commission will also look to expand awareness of its efforts with lawmakers, stakeholders, and the general public to ensure to that all Hoosiers have the opportunity to learn about the

investment that Indiana has made in its children, and that there is a place for everyone at our table. Together, we as a state can make Indiana the best place in the world to be a child.



Commission Members



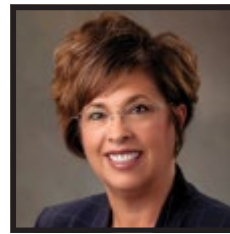
Christine Blessinger
Deputy Commissioner,
Re-entry and Youth Services,
Indiana Department of Correction



Representative Dale DeVon
Indiana State Representative,
District 5



Kristina Box, M.D.
Indiana State Health Commissioner
**succeeded by Lindsay Weaver, M.D., June 2023*



Senator Stacey Donato
Indiana State Senator,
District 18



Senator Jean D. Breaux
Indiana State Senator,
District 34



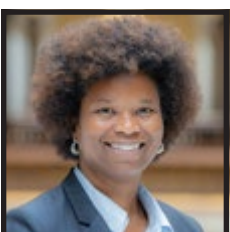
Justin Forkner
Chief Administrative Officer,
Indiana Supreme Court



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



Kory George
Chief Probation Officer,
Wayne County



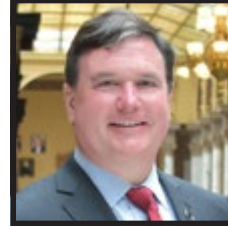
Bernice Corley
Executive Director,
Indiana Public Defender Council



John R. Hammond, IV
Deputy Chief of Staff,
Office of the Governor



Zac Jackson
Indiana State Budget Director



Todd Rokita
Indiana Attorney General



Katie Jenner, Ed. D.
Indiana Secretary of Education



Honorable Loretta Rush
Chief Justice of Indiana
**succeeded by Hon. Dana Kenworthy, April 2023*



Stephaney Knight
Youth Representative



Dan Rusyniak, M.D.
Secretary,
Family and Social Services Administration



Chris Naylor
Executive Director,
Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council



Terry Stigdon
Director,
Department of Child Services
**succeeded by Eric Miller, May 2023*



Dejuana Rodriguez
Youth Representative



Representative Vanessa Summers
Indiana State Representative,
District 99

Task Force & Committee Members

Child Health & Safety Task Force

Sonya Rush, Co-Chair

Indiana Department of Child Services

Kate Schedel, Co-Chair

Indiana Department of Health

Tammie Carter

LifeSmart Youth

Christina Commons

FSSA, First Steps

Kristen Daus

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Belinda Drake

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Maureen Greer

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Office of Early Childhood and Out of
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Indiana Office of Court Services

Hannah Robinson

FSSA

Sandy Runkle

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana

Sarah Sailors

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SCAN, Inc.

Jack Turman

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Prevail

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Prevent Child Abuse Indiana

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Juvenile Justice & Cross-Systems Youth Task Force

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Sullivan County DCS

Mike Gray
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Hon. Dana Kenworthy
Grant Superior Court 2

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Susan Lightfoot
Henry County Probation

Chase Lyday

Avon Community School Corporation
Police

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Chris Naylor

Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council

Sen. Fady Qaddoura

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MSD of Warren Township

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Lindsay Hill Stawick

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Karlin Tichenor, PhD, LLMFT

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State Office of GAL/CASA

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Rep. Carolyn Jackson

Indiana House District 1

Hon. Dana Kenworthy

Grant Superior Court

Sean McCrindle

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Michael Moore

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Jim Oliver

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Terry Stigdon

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Ron Galaviz

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Ben Gavelek

Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Jim Gavin

FSSA

Annie Goeller

Indiana Department of Correction

Michele Holtkamp

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Erin Murphy

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Jennifer O'Malley

Indiana Department of Health

Noelle Russel

Indiana Department of Child Services

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Central Indiana Corporate Partnership

Nikki Ford, Co-Chair

Indiana Department of Child Services

Sirrilla Blackmon

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Mary DePrez

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Wendy Harrold

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Indiana Department of Child Services

Jeff Milkey

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Christine Reynolds

Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Lisa Thompson

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Tamara Weaver

Office of the Attorney General

Equity, Inclusion, & Cultural Competence Committee

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Child Advocates

Timike Jones, Co-Chair

Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Kenneth Allen

Indiana Youth Services Association

Yalonda Brown

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Erin Busk

Indiana Department of Education

Valerie Davidson

Meridian Diversity Consulting

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Carol Franklin

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Brenda Graves-Croom

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Shannon Jackson

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Manpreet Kaur

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Holistic Evolution, Inc.

George Middleton

The George Middleton Group

Tim Nation

Peace Learning Center

Derika Parris

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Indiana Youth Group

Calvin Roberson

Simon Cancer Center at IU Health

Mark Russell

Indianapolis Urban League

Meghan Smith

FSSA, First Steps

Jessica Strong

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Indiana Department of Child Services

Jessica Tomasino

FSSA, First Steps

Adrian Warren

Radio One



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

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