



COMMISSION ON IMPROVING THE STATUS OF CHILDREN IN INDIANA

Final Report

Legislative Council Resolution 14-01

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

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Indiana State Budget Agency

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Indiana Department of Correction, Division
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Henry County Probation Department

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Office of the Governor

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Dr. John Wernert, M.D.

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Family and Social Services Administration

Gregory Zoeller

Indiana Attorney General

I. DIRECTIVES

Under Legislative Council Resolution 14-01, the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana is required to study:

- A. Under-reporting of crimes against children, including the reasons for under reporting. (HB 1137-2014, SECTION 1 (as introduced); IC 16-19-13-7(a)(3)(A), as added by SEA-227-2014, SECTION 6 (study by the Office of Women’s Health or State Department of Health concerning differences between the reporting of crimes of domestic and sexual violence committed against children).

II. SUMMARY OF WORK

July 16, 2014. Representative Christina Hale and Dr. John Parrish-Sprowl, Co-Director, Global Health Communications Center, IUPUI presented information to the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana (CISC) regarding the crimes of domestic or sexual violence study required by SEA 227-2014.

Representative Hale explained the study requires the Office of Women’s Health or the State Department of Health to determine the extent to which crimes of domestic or sexual violence are underreported, to identify what crimes of domestic or sexual violence are most commonly underreported, why victims do not report these crimes, to evaluate methods for improving the reporting of the underreported crimes, and make recommendations concerning best practices.

Representative Hale said the goals of the study are to connect victims to the services they need and to prevent these crimes from happening. Representative Hale and Dr. Parrish-Sprowl highlighted challenges with the study, which include how and when to conduct the study, how to define what the study is looking at, how to obtain available data, and how to finance the study. They reported the Criminal Justice Institute has agreed to fund the first phase of the study, which costs approximately \$65,000.

February 18, 2015. Representative Hale and Dr. Parrish-Sprowl provided the CISC with an update on the progress of the Crimes of Domestic or Sexual Violence study. Dr. Parrish-Sprowl presented preliminary findings, which he said are consistent with previously collected data in Indiana and other states. Researchers are continuing to collect data from all 92 counties from hospitals, schools, libraries, clinics, and community centers.

August 19, 2015. Representative Christina Hale and Dr. Parrish-Sprowl presented the final report for the first phase of the Crimes of Domestic or Sexual Violence Study, entitled “*Investigation into the Adolescent Sexual Assault Underreporting in the State of Indiana.*” Representative Hale stated the study was prompted after a 2008 report from the Centers for Disease Control named Indiana as the second-worst in the nation when it comes to the sexual assaults of young children. She said nearly one in six Hoosier girls are sexually assaulted by the time they are in high school, and an untold number of boys.

The study focused on the issue of underreporting. Indiana does not aggregate the data necessary for tracking adolescent sexual assault, making it difficult to formulate policy and programs effectively.

Underreporting contributes to the problem. It leads to understating the problem, to de facto protection (and tacit support) for perpetrators, and to a disconnect between victims and services.

The study methodology included a review of the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey, a survey of teachers focusing on their observations and interactions regarding students and sexual assault; focus groups with people who work with adolescents including teachers, forensic nurses, and staff from afterschool programs; individual interviews with service providers and physicians; and GIS mapping of Indiana Criminal Justice Institute (ICJI) reimbursement for sexual assault service data.

A copy of the Report and Recommendations is attached. The report can also be found online at: <http://www.in.gov/children/files/An-Investigation-into-Adolescent-Sexual-Assault-Underreporting-in-the-State-of-Indiana.pdf>.

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The CISC made no finding of facts. The CISC supports the following recommendations contained in the *Investigation into the Adolescent Sexual Assault Underreporting in the State of Indiana*:

1. Create a process and repository for all data relating to adolescent sexual assault in the state. This effort should be proactive, ongoing and integrative. It should include data from law enforcement, ICJI, and other relevant data sources to provide a comprehensive picture of adolescent sexual assault across the state.
2. Teachers should be given better training regarding both the short and long-term consequences of sexual abuse and assault, how to recognize the signs, how to have reporting conversations that encourage adolescents to disclose, and how to get them connected to necessary support services.
3. Students need a multi-year curriculum that focuses on how to develop and maintain healthy relationships, and addresses the full range of issues that young people face as they enter into such relationships, including choices about sexual activity, managing conflict, and dating violence.
4. Indiana needs to develop a coherent and comprehensive policy that assists victims of sexual assault when social media are involved.
5. The state should explore a policy that includes restorative justice models as an option in adolescent sexual assault cases. This could encourage reporting and successful mitigation of consequences in many cases.
6. Schools and afterschool programs need trained adults to facilitate discussions with adolescents related to sexuality and relationships. Students need to learn to have informed and thoughtful discussions around this topic.