



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Wednesday, May 8, 2019

Indiana State Library, Author's Room

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Dr. Kris Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, Indiana State Department of Health
- Senator Jean Breaux
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Jason Dudich, Director, State Budget Agency
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Representative David Frizzell
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Curtis T. Hill, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Senator Erin Houchin
- Susan Lightfoot, Chief Probation Officer, Henry County Probation Department
- Dr. Jennifer McCormick, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Indiana Department of Education
- Serrilla Blackmon, Interim Director for Children, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
- David Powell, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Justice Loretta Rush, Chief Justice of Indiana
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Dr. Jennifer Walthall, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chief Justice Rush called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. She then recognized Rep. Frizzell and Jason Dudich for their service on the Commission. Rep. Frizzell is retiring from the Indiana General Assembly, and Jason Dudich is leaving state government for a post at the University of Indianapolis. This was the last meeting for both.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: The minutes from the meeting on February 20, 2019, were approved.

3. Executive Director Update

Presentation: Julie Whitman, Executive Director, presented a final summary of 86 bills that had passed the legislative session and would impact children or child-serving systems. She referred to a [handout](#) and highlighted several bills that touch upon Commission priorities.

Julie then presented a new [accountability report](#) and asked for feedback. She explained that the purpose of the report was to provide the Commission with information about what happened after they took a particular action. The example she presented was their endorsement in 2018 of the Zero Suicide Academy. Julie noted that Commission members can also use the accountability report form to report back to each other on what their agencies are doing pertaining to actions taken by the Commission.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush stated that the accountability report format was a good start and asked that some data or metrics be added to the form.

Presentation: Julie's last presentation item was on youth engagement. A Master of Social Work intern had been placed with the Supreme Court over the past year and, as part of her internship, she studied the best ways to engage youth voice in the work of the Commission. Julie stated that the intern had spoken with staff of several state agencies that have youth councils or similar bodies as well as Maryland's counterpart to the Children's Commission. Her final recommendation was that the Commission host a youth summit that would bring together youth in the existing advisory groups throughout state government. Julie stated that her hope is to have another intern next year to flesh out that idea and bring it as a formal recommendation to the Commission.

4. Strategic Priority: Child Safety and Services

Presentation: Julie presented a summary of the Child Safety and Services' previous [recommendation](#) to create a statewide framework for the prevention of child maltreatment. She reviewed the history of the recommendation and summarized discussions that had happened since the last Commission meeting about the definition of maltreatment. The conclusion of those discussions was that the framework would pertain to preventing harm to children by their parents or caregivers. In other words, the framework is a tool for coordinating primary prevention efforts that can keep families from ever entering into contact with state systems. Julie reported that discussions had also taken place regarding funding of the project, and DCS had agreed to fund the work and issue an RFP for a contractor to serve as a project manager and provide research services for the project. Julie stated that she would remain involved, as would the subcommittee on child abuse prevention, and staff from all the Commission agencies.

Discussion: Terry Stigdon affirmed DCS's support of the project, including the plan to fund it from the DCS budget.

Action: Rep. Frizzell moved to approve moving forward with the framework project, and John Hammond seconded the motion. The Commission voted 12-0 to approve the motion.

Presentation: Sarah Sailors, Deputy Director of Field Operations at DCS, described the Field Operations department and then presented a data update on DCS hotline calls, assessments, open cases, placements, case closures, and repeat maltreatment and re-entry into the DCS system. Sarah's presentation can be found on slides 6-13 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Overall, case numbers are declining without any increase in repeat maltreatment or re-entry into the system.

Discussion: Rep. Summers stated that she has heard from a number of grandparents who have custody of their grandchildren, and those kinship caregivers need a lot of help. She said she is aware that DCS is bringing the kinship navigator program online, and she asked that they do so as quickly as possible, because these caregivers need help now. Sarah said that she would be glad to meet with Rep. Summers and work together on responding to the caregivers that Rep. Summers is in touch with.

Chief Justice Rush asked who is responsible for helping grandparents that are trying to step in and help before DCS becomes involved. Julie mentioned that that is an issue that could be addressed through the prevention framework. Chief Justice Rush also mentioned the possibility of getting volunteer lawyers through the Coalition for Court Access to help grandparents who need to seek guardianship or some other legal remedy to help their grandchildren.

Rep. Summers also asked for clarification about the DCS two-year budget and why it ended up being lower than what DCS requested. Jason Dudich affirmed that DCS's appropriation was reduced by \$30-40 million in the first year of the upcoming biennium and \$40-50 million in the second year. He stated that there were two drivers to that, one being the fact that caseloads are going down. The other is that language was added to the budget to go to a capitation rate rather than a fee-for-service rate for family preservation services, which is anticipated to save approximately \$20 million. There is also an agreement that DCS can access surplus funds later if they are needed.

Rep. Summers thanked the Commission for allowing time to her questions. She stated that her caucus was not clear on whether the reduction in DCS funding was because of more children going into relative care, and those families not receiving any resources. Jason clarified that the budget reduction was due to an overall reduction in DCS cases and did not target any specific group of cases.

5. Strategic Priority: Educational Outcomes

Presentation: Valerie Beard of Indiana Department of Education presented highlights from a new report on the educational outcomes of homeless youth. Her presentation can be found on slides 15-25 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Overall, homeless youth have lower educational outcomes than their peers in every category. The Department of Education will be working on a remediation plan for homeless youth and would like to come back and present that when it is ready.

Discussion: Rep. Frizzell asked whether there was any national data available to compare with Indiana's numbers. Valerie said that the Department would be choosing comparable states and looking at that data in the process of coming up with the remediation plan. Chief Justice Rush offered the assistance of the Commission in the process of developing the remediation plan.

Senator Breaux asked whether there was any standardized program in the public schools to serve homeless youth and whether there was a need for funding. Valerie explained the requirements of the federal McKinney-Vento law, which mandates every school district to have a liaison for homeless youth. The federal government also provides some grant funds to support services for homeless youth. Those services may look different in every district. IDOE provides training for the McKinney Vento liaisons every year.

Sirrilla Blackmon asked if the data were available broken down by race, gender, and age. Valerie indicated that the [full report](#) did include those breakdowns.

Presentation: Melaina Gant of DCS made a presentation on the educational outcomes of foster youth. Her presentation can be found on slides 27-50 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). The foster youth data [report](#), like the report on homeless youth, was mandated by HEA 1314-2018. Overall, foster youth have significantly lower educational outcomes than their peers in every category, and their outcomes are lower than those of homeless youth. A remediation plan is due June 30, 2019.

Discussion: Dave Powell asked whether the foster youth who were not included in the graduation rate were still in school or had dropped out. Jeff Wittman stated that the statistic meant that those students were no longer with their freshman cohort, meaning that they could still be in school or they might have dropped out.

Terry Stigdon asked whether there was any information on how many Indiana schools are trauma-informed. Melaina stated that there is not data on that, however DCS does offer a training for schools on becoming trauma-informed, and that training is offered through IDOE's online learning system. IDOE has also started a department that is focused on social-emotional support and mental health of students.

Chief Justice Rush mentioned that CASA advocates were mandated in every CHINS case, and many are retired teachers. She noted that they would be a good resource to help with the remediation plan.

Presentation: Jeff Wittman of IDOE presented the process that IDOE has set up to develop the foster youth remediation plan. IDOE has convened a multidisciplinary group that will continue to meet regularly; improving education for foster youth will be an ongoing process.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush asked whether the Educational Outcomes Task Force would be looking at the remediation plan for foster youth, and Jeff and Melaina affirmed that the Task Force would be involved.

Presentation: The Commission viewed the [trailer of the film *Resilience*](#). Christy Berger of the Indiana Department of Education presented a [recommendation](#) that the Commission endorse a series of screenings of the film with panel discussions on trauma-informed care in each screening community. Panels may include representatives of education, the medical field, and in some communities juvenile justice stakeholders or trauma-informed first responders. Christy noted that the series of screenings build up to an all-day event on July 19 sponsored by Franciscan Health where Dr. Anda, the original creator of the ACES study, will speak.

Action: Representative Frizzell moved to endorse the film screening and panel discussion series, and Representative Summers seconded. The motion passed 11-0.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush said she would like to see some juvenile justice stakeholders at the July 19 event. Dave Powell asked whether the film was available to show, and Christy explained the cost of purchasing the film and screening rights for it, which runs in the hundreds of dollars. She also mentioned that several of the collaborators own copies of the DVD they can lend, and several libraries have also purchased the film.

Presentation: Dr. Theresa Ochoa of Indiana University made a presentation about educational transitions for highly mobile youth, especially those who are transitioning back to school after juvenile justice confinement. Her presentation can be found on slides 53-63 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). The subcommittee also submitted a detailed [report](#) to the Commission. She presented recommended practices based on an extensive literature review of educational transitions for youth. The subcommittee found that children who are not in school get lost in the transition process, and there is an institutional barrier around communication and information sharing on behalf of the children. Recommendations include keeping students in the classroom and school in the first place through positive behavior management; adding transition experts in schools, programs, and agencies; and requiring multi-disciplinary teams to plan for transitions.

A new subcommittee will take on the next steps of examining the feasibility of different information-sharing models and how to implement them.

6. Strategic Priority: Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Presentation: Serrilla Blackmon's scheduled presentation was tabled due to time constraints.

7. Committee Updates

Presentation: Committee updates were tabled due to time constraints.

8. Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence

Presentation: Jane Siegel of the Indiana Supreme Court and co-chair of the Equity, Inclusion and Cultural Competence Committee, stated that many members of the Committee were in attendance and they were excited to be able to offer a presentation on the history of race and ethnicity in the youth justice system by Gina Peralta of the W. Haywood Burns Institute. Jane also thanked JDAI and the Supreme Court's Race and Gender Fairness Commission who helped sponsor the presentation. Gina began her presentation during the last 20 minutes of the Commission meeting. The presentation continued as an optional lunch and learn after the official close of the Commission meeting. Her presentation can be found on slides 103-133 on the [meeting PowerPoint](#).

9. Adjournment

The meeting was officially adjourned at 12:16 p.m.