



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Wednesday, December 18, 2019

Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room B

- 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
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Curtis T. Hill, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Senator Erin Houchin
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Susan Lightfoot, Chief Probation Officer, Henry County Probation Department
- Dr. Jennifer McCormick, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Indiana Department of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Justice Loretta Rush, Chief Justice of Indiana
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Dr. Jennifer Sullivan, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Representative Vanessa Summers

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chief Justice Rush called the meeting to order at 10:03 and welcomed all participants and guests. The agenda was re-ordered to move items not requiring a quorum to the top while awaiting late arrivals.

2. Strategic Priority: Child Safety and Services

Presentation: Heather Kestian of DCS presented an update (slides 23-37 in the [meeting PowerPoint](#)) on DCS's progress in preparing for implementation of the federal Family First Prevention and Services Act (FFPSA).

Discussion: **Chief Justice Rush** said it would be helpful to have a map of where FFPSA-eligible evidence-based programs are available. Chief Justice Rush also asked whether there were multi-disciplinary groups working on the FFPSA planning, and Heather replied that it is a goal for 2020 to develop those work groups.

Senator Houchin asked whether DCS was investing in methadone as a prevention strategy, since there are much better treatments available today. **Terry Stigdon** clarified that the Department was not necessarily promoting methadone therapy, but simply offering the Commission information on which programs from among those approved on the federal clearinghouse are currently available in Indiana. **Dr. Box** reminded the Commission about the neonatal abstinence program the Health Department is operating with most of the state's delivering hospitals to engage mothers with substance use disorders in appropriate treatment.

Bernice Corley expressed a concern about DCS workers being able to fully implement FFPSA in the spirit of keeping families together when it is safe to do so, in light of a recent case where a prosecutor charged a DCS case worker with neglect of a dependent. Bernice noted that if workers fear these types of actions, they may be quick to remove out of fear.

Chief Justice Rush mentioned the importance of trauma-informed services and the marvelous opportunity presented by FFPSA to take a system-wide approach and move upstream.

3. Consent Agenda

Discussion: Julie Whitman explained the use of the consent agenda. Senator Houchin requested removal of item (d) the IDOE positive discipline guide from the consent agenda.

Action: Bernice Corley moved to approve the remaining items in the consent agenda (October [minutes](#), Equity committee [co-chair appointment](#), and approval of a [report on CHINS 3.5](#)). The motion was seconded and passed 11-0.

Action: Rep. Summers moved to approve the IDOE [positive discipline guide](#). The motion was seconded and passed, 10-1.

4. Strategic Plan

Presentation: Julie Whitman presented a summary of the proposed new [strategic plan](#), which was presented fully at the October meeting, as well as revisions to the Commission's ["Roles and Responsibilities" document](#).

Action: Rep. Summers moved to approve the new strategic plan. The motion was seconded and passed 11-0.

Presentation: Julie presented a request from FSSA that the Commission serve as the governance body for the state's [birth-to-five strategic plan](#), which aligns with the Commission's strategic plan and structure.

Action: Terry Stigdon moved to approve the Commission's role as the governance body for the state's birth-to-five strategic plan. The motion was seconded and passed, 11-0.

5. Strategic Priority: Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth

Presentation: Victoria Szczechowski presented a [request from Rep. McNamara](#) for the Commission to establish a juvenile justice reform task force to work with the Council of State Governments Justice Center on a [project to](#) assess the state's juvenile justice data infrastructure.

Discussion: Chris Naylor asked what problems the project was trying to solve that would require an out-of-state group to come in and do this work. Chris noted that Indiana has made a lot of progress in the juvenile justice area and may be ahead of other states. He raised the question to the Commission whether this was work that Indiana could take on by itself, similar to the Evidence-Based Decision Making project led by the courts with many Indiana justice system stakeholders.

Senator Houchin echoed Chris Naylor's questions and expressed a concern about having an outside group come in with its own perspective.

Chris Blessinger asked a question about the timeline and what would be accomplished in the six-to-nine months noted in the project summary. Victoria and Julie explained that that timeline only involves the first phase of work, which is an assessment of the state's data systems.

Bernice Corley expressed support for the potential project, as an opportunity to take more time than what the legislative session allows to fully explore issues. She noted that in her view the system still has many opportunities for improvement.

Chief Justice Rush moved that the Commission table the issue until Rep. McNamara could come back to answer the questions raised. The motion was seconded and passed 11-0.

6. Strategic Priority: Child Safety and Services

Presentation: Sharon Pierce of The Villages presented information on kinship care in Indiana (slides 13-20 in the [meeting PowerPoint](#)) and asked for the Commission's approval of a [recommendation](#) to work with the Coalition for Court Access to develop self-help guardianship forms for kinship caregivers and post them on [Indianalegalhelp.org](#).

Discussion: **Rep. Summers** commented that there are still so many caregivers who need help but are not aware of where to get it. She expressed frustration at the slow pace of the work to help these families. Chief Justice Rush, Terry Stigdon, and Dr. Box described current work and the steps the state is taking to expedite the help to families. Chief Justice Rush encouraged Rep. Summers to continue urging action on the issue.

Action: Bernice Corley moved to approve the [recommendation](#) for the subcommittee to work with the Coalition for Court Access on guardianship forms. The motion was seconded and passed 11-0.

Presentation: Chris Daley of IARCA presented a [recommendation](#) for the Commission to endorse a [resource guide](#) on reducing the use of seclusion and restraint in child-caring settings.

Discussion: Chris Naylor asked whether the guide created any new prohibitions. Chris Daley said that it did not; the idea was to provide resources to guide institutions on best practices.

Action: Terry Stigdon moved that the Commission approve the resource guide. The motion was seconded and passed 10-0.

Presentation: Dr. Box presented information on youth vaping in Indiana (slides 39-63 in the [meeting PowerPoint](#)) and the things that ISDH is doing to prevent vaping and help youth who are already addicted to quit.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush commented that there is a need for training on this vaping information throughout the state. Dr. Box said that ISDH would be happy to provide additional training. She talked about how ISDH is training schools on the most helpful responses to vaping.

Chris Naylor thanked Dr. Box for the presentation and noted that he would like to see similar preventative education for teens on marijuana and other high-THC products available today. Dr. Box agreed that education could be developed along the lines of the message put out by the Surgeon General, who has made a statement that THC products do not belong in the hands of teens or pregnant women.

7. Committee Updates

Presentation: Reps. Clere and Wright reported that they had their first meeting as the new co-chairs of the Child Services Oversight Committee the day before the Commission meeting, with presentations by DCS, CASA, and the DCS Ombudsman. Rep. Clere noted that the Committee plans to meet three times in 2020 beginning after the legislative session. Topics they have identified include DOE and DCS partnerships in schools, implementation of Family First, programs offered by The Villages, rate setting, human trafficking, data, staff turnover, and early intervention resources for families. He reported that the Committee has decided to take public comment for the first time. Rep. Clere reported that Senator Messmer has stepped down from the Child Services Oversight Committee and they were working with Julie and the Executive Committee to make a new appointment. Rep. Wright indicated her enthusiasm for the work of the committee.

Discussion: Senator Houchin noted that she had recommended Senator Jon Ford to take Senator Messmer's place on the committee. Julie confirmed that Senator Ford had reached out and expressed interest in the committee seat.

8. Commission Discussion

Chief Justice Rush encouraged all Commission members to raise topics they might be interested in hearing more about at a Commission meeting.

Senator Houchin raised an idea she had learned about at a meeting over the interim. She suggested a census of foster placements and trends over time, including projections of what will be needed in the future.

Rep. Summers requested that the Commission also look into the negatives of foster care at the same time.

The Chief Justice stated that she would like an update on infant mortality.

9. Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence

Presentation: Timike Jones of ICADV presented a [common language document](#) on behalf of the Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence Committee. She explained the major concepts defined in the document and the reasons for having commonly agreed upon definitions as a starting point for equity work. Julie Whitman requested that the Commission review the document and provide any feedback prior to the next Commission meeting and explained that the goal is for the Commission to eventually adopt a set of definitions, similar to what the Commission did last year for trauma.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush asked for guidance for judges to use on the bench, similar to what the Judicial Opioid Task Force did to help judges know how to use language that does not stigmatize people.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 a.m.