



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Annual Report

July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

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Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Dear fellow Hoosier,

It has been a year of tremendous growth and opportunity for the Commission on Improving the Status of Children. Following allocations made through the 2023 biennial state budget, we made several strategic investments. The position of Commission Coordinator was created, allowing us to better support and grow our network of hundreds of state employees and volunteers serving on our committees, task forces, and subcommittees. Additional administrative support was also brought to the Commission, allowing for better tracking of our activities, improved partner engagement, and the expansion of public-facing events and activities.

Most importantly, we have been able to continue expanding our work to integrate the voices of those impacted by state systems into our actions and recommendations. Our second cohort of Youth Representatives have joined the Commission, and we are growing the presence of youth on our task forces as well. A new partnership for the annual Day of the Child brought hundreds of school-aged Hoosiers to the statehouse to learn more about their government and the value of their voices. Looking forward, we are excited for our new Task Force on Suicide Prevention, Bullying, and Online Safety to begin its work. This group will be our first with the intentional goal of having youth and family voices on each of its subcommittees.

We are also proud to say that Indiana was one of only five states selected to participate in the Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving Youth Initiative of the Forum for Youth Investment. This three-year technical assistance program will be co-led by the Children's Commission and also includes the Department of Education, Department of Health, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, four youth representatives, and a parent representative collaborating on the issue of chronic absenteeism.

Lastly, we have been able to greatly increase the Commission's presence at the Indiana Statehouse. Building stronger, cooperative relationships with our legislators has improved our ability to shepherd recommendations through the legislative process, while also allowing us to link legislators to subject matter expertise and successful youth service program models.

It has been an honor to serve Indiana through the Commission on Improving the Status of Children over the past year, and I look forward to sharing even more successes in the future. When we all work together, there is no doubt that we can achieve everything our children deserve.



For the children,

Mark A. Fairchild, MSW
Executive Director

Commission Meetings

State Fiscal Year: July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

August 2023

At its August meeting, the Children’s Commission voted to approve the Youth Justice Oversight Committee’s recommendation report. This report combined the recommendations of the YJOC subgroups including Behavioral Health, Data, Diversion, Grants Process, Juvenile Probation Standards, Screening and Assessment, and Transitional Services, while consulting a Youth and Family Advisory group. The presentation also mentioned that the Commission will maintain a relationship supporting the YJOC in its implementation and staffing of the recommendations. Commission Chair Senator Stacey

Donato and Executive Director Mark Fairchild reviewed current legislative affairs practices and the need for a more formal process in the future. Mark was tasked with drafting a process to be presented at a future meeting. The Commission’s Youth and Family Engagement Summit, themed “Unmuting Your Authenticity,” is tentatively scheduled for December 1-2, 2024.

These items helped guide the actions of the Executive Director during the Indiana General Assembly. Dejana Rodriguez presented an update on the 2023 Family and Youth Engagement Summit titled “Unmuting Your Authenticity,” planned by herself and Stephaney Knight. Finally, the Commission heard a presentation from Judge Kimberly Dowling on behalf of the Child Sexual Exploitation of Children subcommittee.

October 2023

At its October meeting, the Commission approved a set of legislative affairs guiding principles and agreed on the need for future approval of a legislative engagement agenda.

December 2023

At its December meeting, the Children’s Commission finalized its legislative affairs and engagement plan. This plan listed the legislative topics relevant to



Michelle Bulington presents on Bullying and Suicide Prevention to the Commission.

the Commission's strategic plan, additional issues suggested by members, and the activities to increase assistance to lawmakers. The Commission's coordinator and youth representatives recapped the 2023 Youth and Family Engagement Summit, sharing attendance statistics, highlights, and future summit plans. Next, Dr. Weaver and Kate Schedel presented the importance of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Last, the Commission's Task Force chairs recapped their work from 2023 and discussed future goals and projects.

February 2024

At the February meeting of the Children's Commission, members were provided with an update on legislative actions and engagement during the first half of the legislative session. Executive Director Mark Fairchild shared that many items impacting the health and safety of Indiana's children successfully became law. Also noted was how the increased presence of the Commission at the Statehouse provided opportunities to assist and educate legislators, opening the door to future cooperative opportunities. The Commission also heard a presentation from Monica Roose of the Indiana Birth Parent Advisory Board, with recorded contributions from two of its members, discussing the need to ensure parent voices are considered.



Commission members listen as Indiana State Health Commissioner Lindsay Weaver presents on the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

April 2024

At the April meeting, the Children's Commission heard presentations from the Division of Mental Health and Addiction about suicide, bullying, and social media and the Indiana Youth Services Association about prevention programming. The Commission also voted to approve the creation of a new task force on Suicide Prevention, Bullying, and Online Safety; heard updates on legislative actions during the 2024 session; and discussed future Day of the Child events. The meeting closed with recognition of the passing of Senator Jean Breaux, announcing the Commission internship to be renamed the Senator Jean Breaux Collaboration Fellowship.

June 2024

At the June meeting, the Children's Commission heard presentations from the Department of Health on the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, LifeSmart Youth on healthy teen relationships, and the



Tammie Carter of LifeSmart Youth speaks about her organization's commitment to empower youth to make responsible choices and adopt healthy behaviors.

Indiana Youth Institute on the KIDS COUNT® Data Book. The Commission also heard updates on the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Subcommittee, the Bullying and Suicide Prevention and Online Safety Task Force, and Indiana's selection to participate in the Forum for Youth Investment's BEST Youth Initiative.

FAMILY & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

All solutions are more effective if those who are expected to benefit from them participate in the process of developing them. The Commission continued and expanded our work to include lived-experience voices wherever possible.



2nd Team of Youth Representatives Reflect

In July of 2023, the Commission welcomed as members two new young adults with previous experience with state systems. Julia Stumler and Aly Leonard immediately became great assets to the Commission, providing new perspectives and incredible energy that have taken our efforts to integrate and elevate lived-experience voices to new levels. Below are their thoughts on the first year of their two-year terms.

“I became a part of the Commission last year to help provide lived expertise to conversations surrounding children and families in Indiana. Incorporating experience from the receiving end of a system or program is an innovative way to employ change. My role on the Commission allows for just that—ideas, commentary, and innovation stemming from my own lived experience as a child facing the foster care system in Indiana.

My time on the Commission has been immensely rewarding. I have had the chance to lead but also the opportunity to learn. Being a part of the Commission furthered my understanding of leadership and using my own story to wield change. However, it also reminded me to sit back, learn, and listen in order to invite other stories of expertise to the table. To me, the collaborative spirit of the Commission is by far the most influential portion of this team. It has been an incredible space to work in, with legislators and change-makers constantly coming to the table with enthusiasm and compassion. It is a space where innovative ideas are welcomed by people from all backgrounds and beliefs. When I think of teamwork, I think of the Commission.”

- Julia Stumler

“I am appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of the second cohort of youth representatives serving on the Commission. This role and seat at the table is monumental for constituents of the child welfare system, and that weight is not lost on me. I have had a very positive experience with my fellow members of the Commission, who have been incredibly welcoming and treat me as an equal. This has been a chance to provide a recipient’s point of view of the policies and practices that I recently navigated and has opened up critical conversations of where our state systems need support. I am very excited and looking forward to where the work on the Commission will take us in this next year.”

- Aly Leonard



Executive Director Mark Fairchild speaks to Day of the Child attendees in the Indiana House of Representatives chamber.

2023 Youth and Family Engagement Summit

The Children's Commission hosted a two-day, virtual summit on December 1 and 2 on the theme of "Unmuting Your Authenticity." The summit had a goal of increasing and amplifying the voices of those with lived experience. Day one of the event focused on how professionals can build and encourage engagement, while day two focused on informing youth, parents, family, and community members on how they can use their voices to help make positive change for Hoosier

youth. Each day opened with a lived-experience speaker setting the tone, with over a dozen lived-experience panelists, planners, and contributors helping to make the summit true to its goal.

Day of the Child Expansion

The Commission supported a set of coordinated events at the Indiana Statehouse on President's Day 2024 in celebration of it being proclaimed "Day of the Child" by the office of Governor Eric Holcomb. The Marion County Commission on Youth welcomed hundreds of young advocates from around the state for the annual Youth Day at the Statehouse. Young Hoosiers

had the opportunity to see the Indiana General Assembly in action and share their voices at this engaging event.

In the Indiana House of Representatives chamber, the annual State of the Child kickoff event was hosted by the Indiana Youth Institute. State, federal, and local leaders and youth service providers gathered to learn how Indiana children are doing across the categories of family and community, health, economic well-being, and education. This event kicked off IYI's statewide State of the Child campaign, which includes more than a dozen in-person and virtual events this February through April to share the 2024 Indiana KIDS COUNT® Data Book.

Indiana Selected for BEST Youth Initiative

Indiana is proud to announce its selection for the Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving Youth Initiative, a groundbreaking three-year program led by the Forum for Youth Investment. This initiative aims to enhance outcomes for youth ages 5-24 through collaborative, cross-system approaches. According to the Forum for Youth Investment, Indiana was chosen for its commitment to improving youth outcomes through strategic system alignment, readiness to shift from reactive approaches to proactive cross-sector solutions, and dedication to engaging diverse voices, especially those with lived experiences.

Our state team brings together Indiana's Department of Education, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, Department of Health, Commission on Improving the Status of Children, and many other state agency partners. The team also includes individuals with lived experience, including four youth representing each system, and one parent, ensuring a diversity of perspectives. The three-year program began in the summer of 2024.



Erin Reynolds, Commission intern (left), and Blane Cook, Commission Coordinator (right), provide information to attendees at the Day of the Child event at the Statehouse.

Commission Coordinator Position Opens New Possibilities

In 2023, the Commission allocated funds for the position of Commission Coordinator. This staffing addition has allowed for better support of our task forces and committees, as well as greatly increased awareness of the Commission among stakeholders.

“Reflecting on my first year as the Commission’s coordinator, a few major highlights come to mind. The addition of my position allowed for maintaining our existing task forces and committees and helping in the expansion of new ones. Supporting each group’s needs included relieving co-chairs of administrative duties, maintaining lines of communication, and connecting the groups to their necessary audiences.

My position also allowed the Commission to be present in more places. I have been able to attend many events with Indiana’s agencies and community partners. This allowed us to both be better informed about the issues that face Indiana’s youth, as well as be active participants in discussions about solutions. Last, the Commission’s efforts to uplift and incorporate the voices of our community have grown exponentially. Whether through supporting the Commission’s youth representatives, adding parents and young adults to its task forces, or building community partnerships fueling our events and initiatives, my time as coordinator has helped strengthen our approach to community representation.”

**- Blane Cook,
Commission Coordinator**

Commission Members



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



Senator Stacey Donato
Indiana State Senator,
District 18



Senator Jean D. Breaux
Indiana State Senator,
District 34

**succeeded by Sen. La Keisha Jackson, June 2024*



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



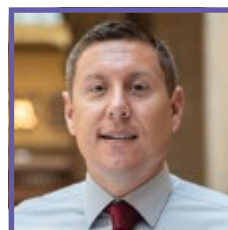
Bernice Corley
Executive Director,
Indiana Public Defender Council



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



Representative Dale DeVon
Indiana State Representative,
District 5

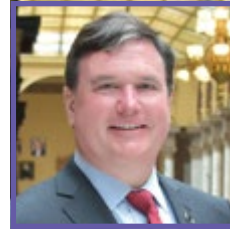


Zac Jackson
Indiana State Budget Director

**succeeded by Joseph Habig, June 2024*



Katie Jenner, Ed. D.
Indiana Secretary of Education



Todd Rokita
Indiana Attorney General



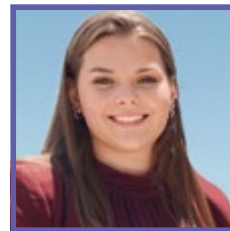
Honorable Dana Kenworthy
Court of Appeals of Indiana



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



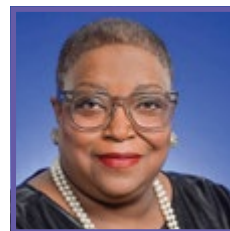
Aly Leonard
Youth Representative



Julia Stumler
Youth Representative



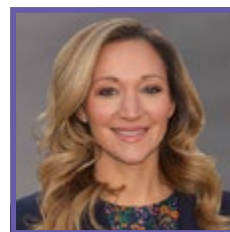
Eric Miller
Director,
Department of Child Services



Representative Vanessa Summers
Indiana State Representative,
District 99



Chris Naylor
Executive Director,
Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council



Lindsay Weaver, M.D.
Indiana State Health Commissioner

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

Olivia Clark

Indiana Department of Health

Christina Commons

FSSA, First Steps

Rachael Fisher

Lutherwood

Katie Goodwell

FSSA

Maureen Greer

Indiana Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative

Kristi Linson

Indiana Department of Health

Sue McKinney

FSSA

Carey Michels

FSSA

Hannah Milner

Foster Success

Sam Mundt

Indiana Department of Health

Derika Parris

Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana

Shannon Schumacher

The Villages

Angela Smith-Grossman

Indiana Department of Child Services

Willie Taylor

Indiana Department of Child Services

Jack Turman

Indiana University, Grassroots MCH Leaders

Elizabeth Wahl

FSSA

Brittany Winebar

Prevail

Jeff Wittman

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana

Educational Outcomes Task Force

Brianna Morse, Co-Chair

Indiana Department of Workforce Development

Michelle Clarke, Co-Chair

Indiana Department of Education

Sarah Allison

Indiana Department of Education

Mary Beth Buzzard

Indiana Department of Correction

Leslie Caliz

Indiana Department of Education

Shannon Chambers

Johnson County Government

Hilary Deardorf

Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Bart Doan

Indiana Department of Workforce Development

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Koyauna Jones

Indiana Department of Education

Jonathan Kraeszig

FSSA

Susan Lightfoot

Henry County Probation

Janet Martinez

Marion County Public Defender Agency

Jennah Mosley

FSSA

Jason Murrey

Indiana Department of Education

Kelsey Peaper

Indiana Department of Education

Rebecca Shetler-Fast

Child and Parent Services

Gil Smith

Indiana Department of Child Services

Christopher Stilwell

Indiana Department of Correction

Bryan Varner

Indiana Association of Home Educators

Jarod Wilson

Foster Success

Juvenile Justice & Cross-Systems Youth Task Force

Hon. Vicki Carmichael, Co-Chair
Clark Circuit Court

Nancy Wever, Co-Chair
Indiana Office of Court Services,
Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative

Steve Balko
Indiana Department of Education

Amber Becker
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and
Addiction

Kate Collins
Indiana Department of Child Services

Alison Cox
Indiana Juvenile Detention Association

Ann Davis
Indiana Association of Resources and
Child Advocacy

Terrie Decker
Indiana Department of Correction

Chris Dixson
Indiana Department of Correction

Hon. Kimberly Dowling
Delaware Circuit Court #2

Suzanne Draper
Vanderburgh County CASA, Inc.

Tracy Fitz
Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council

James (Mike) Goodwin
Sullivan County DCS

JauNae Hanger
Children's Policy and Law Initiative of
Indiana

Rebecca Humphrey
Tippecanoe County Government

Jill Johnson
Marion County Public Defender Agency

Samantha Lewis
Wayne County Probation

Kiarra Pearson
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Addiction

Leah Pezzarossi
Open Door Youth Services

Kaylee Price
Youth Representative

Colleen Saylor
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Don Travis
Indiana Department of Child Services

Renee White
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Joel Wieneke
Indiana Public Defender Council

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Task Force

Tanya Merritt-Mulamba, Co-Chair
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and
Addiction

David Reed, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Child Services

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Sirilla Blackmon
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Cathy Boggs
Community Health Network

Michelle Bulington
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Karin Gilbert
Bring Change to Mind

Julianne Guist, MD
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Kaylee May
Community Representative

Steve McCaffrey
Mental Health America of Indiana

Bridget McIntyre
Indiana Department of Child Services

Jason Murrey
Indiana Department of Education

Gabriela Rodríguez, PhD
Indiana University School of Medicine

Ty Rowilson
Choices Coordinated Care Solutions

Jennifer Tackitt-Dorfmeier
Choices Coordinated Care Solutions

Steve Viewheg
Indiana University School of Medicine

Data Sharing & Mapping Committee

Josie Fasoldt, Co-Chair
Central Indiana Corporate Partnership

Nikki Ford, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Child Services

Tyler Brown
Indiana Department of Education

Mary DePrez
Indiana Office of Court Technology

Wendy Harrold
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and
Addiction

Christine Reynolds
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute

Lisa Thompson
Indiana Office of Court Technology

Tamara Weaver
Office of the Attorney General

Bri Youn
Indiana Youth Institute



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