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Commission on  
Improving the  
Status of Children

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# Commission on Improving the Status of Children

## AUGUST 20, 2025

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# Agenda

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## 1. Welcome and Introductions

### a. New Commission members formally introduced

- Jada Cuttriss, Youth Representative
- Emma Blackwell, Youth Representative
- Audrey Arbogast, Governor's Office Appointment
- Chad Ranney, State Budget Director

### b. Review of CISC member roles and participation expectations

# Youth Representatives

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Jada Cuttriss



Emma Blackwell



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# CISC MEMBER ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

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Hon. Dana Kenworthy, CHAIR  
Commission On Improving The Status Of Children In  
Indiana

## STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES OF CISC (IC 2-5-36)

Study and evaluate issues related to youth including:

- Access to services, duplication of services, funding of services, barriers to services and the communication and cooperation by agencies concerning vulnerable youth.
- Implementation of programs or laws concerning vulnerable youth, the consolidation of existing entities that serve vulnerable youth, data from state agencies relevant to evaluating progress, targeting efforts, and demonstrating outcomes.
- Crimes of sexual violence against children and the impact of social networking websites, cellular telephones and wireless communications devices, digital media, and new technology on crimes against children.

## STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES OF CISC (IC 2-5-36)

- Review and make recommendations concerning legislation.
- Promote information sharing, best practices, policies, and programs.
- Cooperate with other child-focused commissions, the judicial branch of government, the executive branch of government, stakeholders, and members of the community.
- Provide staff support to the Youth Justice Oversight Committee
- Create and provide staff support to the Youth, Family & Caregiver Engagement Initiative under HEA 1098 (2025).
- Submit a report by September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year to the Legislative Council, the Governor, and the Chief Justice.

# EXPECTATIONS OF CISC MEMBERS

- All CISC members are either named in statute by their position or assigned by an appointing authority as indicated in statute.
- Also per statute, the affirmative vote of a majority of voting members - *not just those members present* - is required for the CISC to take action.
- Our statute was written in this manner to ensure that all issues and recommendations coming before the were fully vetted and approved by its full membership, including those with implementing authority.
- The strength of this commission is based on its ability to craft solutions that can improve the lives of Hoosier youth, with our recommendations holding the power of multi-branch, cross-agency, bipartisan endorsement.
- Bottom line: **Your presence and participation is valued and necessary!**

# Agenda

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## 2. Consent Agenda

**Action:** Approve Minutes from the April and June 2025 Meetings

# Agenda

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## 3. Juvenile Justice & Cross-System Youth Task Force Recommendation

- a. Recommendation regarding family access for youth in secure detention
  - Nancy Wever and Hon. Holly Harvey, Task Force co-chairs



# Juvenile Justice and Cross System Youth Task Force

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**A Task Force of the Commission on Improving the  
Status of Children in Indiana**

August 20, 2025

# Members



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## **Judge Holly Harvey – Co-Chair**

*Monroe Circuit Court – Division 7*

## **Nancy Wever – Co-Chair**

*Indiana Office of Court Services*

## **Steve Balko**

*Indiana Department of Education*

## **Amber Becker**

*Division of Mental Health and Addiction*

## **Ann Davis**

*Indiana Association of Resources and Child Advocacy (IARCA)*

## **Terrie Decker**

*Indiana Department of Correction, DYS*

## **Judge Kim Dowling**

*Delaware Circuit Court 2*

## **Tracy Fitz**

*Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council*

## **Mike Goodwin**

*Department of Child Services*

## **JauNae Hanger**

*Waples & Hanger*

## ***Liz Houdek***

*Indiana Public Defender Council*

## ***Waylon James***

*Department of Child Services*

## **Jill Johnson**

*Marion County Public Defender Agency,  
Juvenile Division*

## **Samantha Lewis**

*Wayne County Probation*

## **Joshua Nichols**

*Indiana Juvenile Detention Association*

## **Kiarra Pearson**

*Division of Mental Health and Addiction*

## **Leah Pezzarossi**

*Open Door Youth Services*

## **Kaylee Price**

*Lived-Experience Community*

## **Colleen Saylor**

*Indiana Office of Court Services*

## **Ellen Sheets**

*Indiana Criminal Justice Institute*

## **Joel Wieneke**

*Child Advocates*

# **Strategic Goal: Improve safety and outcomes of youth who encounter the justice system**

## **Objective #1**

**Identify and encourage adoption of effective and promising practices for identification, referral, and appropriate services for victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)**

## **Objective #2**

**Identify and encourage adoption of effective policies and practices that promote family engagement, healing, and growth in juvenile status offense cases**

## **Objective #3**

**Identify and encourage adoption of effective and promising programs and practices to support the healthy development of children with an incarcerated parent**

## **Objective #4**

**Identify and encourage adoption of effective and promising practices and policies that integrate the science of child and adolescent development into the justice system's response to children and youth**

# Family Visits for Detained Youth



# Associated Benefits

- Family visitation for persons in custody has been shown to reduce misconduct and recidivism. --Evelyn F. McCoy, Breanna Boppre, *Making Jail and Prison Visits Easier Makes Communities Safer*, urban.org
- For juveniles, "research suggests family visitation is associated with higher GPA, fewer infractions, and decreased risk of depressive symptoms for youth in custody[.]" --Alyssa M. Mikytuck, B.A., *The relationship between family visitation and re-entry expectations among juvenile detainees*, 2017



# Existing Indiana Juvenile Policy

Ind. Code 31-10-2-1: "(1) recognize the importance of family and children in our society, including the rights of a parent . . ."

210 IAC 8-4-20: "sufficient space" must be "provided for a visiting room or areas for contact visiting."

210 IAC 8-6-25: "juveniles are not subject to . . . Punitive interference with the following daily functions of living: . . . Family contact, as long as security is not compromised."

# 17 Facilities. 17 Different Ways

- Because Indiana law provides no specifics for visitation, juvenile detention centers have developed their own policies, which are vastly different.



# Family Access is Frequently Tied to Behavior

- Many facilities use a "level" system which influences both frequency and duration of family access
  - Both phone calls and in-person visits
  - Only 3 facilities expressly limit visitation restriction to safety concerns
  - More likely to impact calls, but behavior can lose in-person visits
  - Bad behavior includes: cussing, disrespect, non-compliance, aggression, and fighting



# Phone Calls

**Call frequency:** Between 1 per week (2 facilities), up to 2 calls each day (1 facility). Most allow 2—3 per week.

**Call length:** 6 out of 13 limit to 5 minutes (depending), 3 allow up to 15 minutes, 1 up to 20, and 1 allows up to 30 minutes. 1 facility "depends on level"

**Cost:** Most do not charge. 2 facilities charge, and 2 it is unclear



# In-Person Visits

- All but 1 allow
- **Duration:** between 25—30 minutes and 1 hour
- **Opportunity:** 1 facility only on Sunday, 1 facility Saturday or Sunday, several have short windows during select days (e.g. between 8-9 pm on weekdays and 10-11 am on weekends)
- 7 facilities provide for audio/visual visits when in-person is not available, multiple are working on it

# The Proposed Legislation (overview)







**Thank you for the  
opportunity to do  
this work!**

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# Agenda

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- 4. BEST Youth Initiative Recommendation
  - a. Presentation of position statement on chronic absenteeism
  - b. Commission Discussion and Q&A

**Action:** Approval of Position Statement



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# PROPOSED CISC POSITION STATEMENT ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

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**MARK FAIRCHILD**, MSW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
COMMISSION ON IMPROVING THE  
STATUS OF CHILDREN IN INDIANA

## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM ISSUE OVERVIEW

The root causes behind why students miss school are complex and varied, making chronic absence an inherently challenging problem to address. However, ensuring students attend school every day and actively engage in their learning is foundational to their lifelong success.

Chronic absenteeism – missing 10% or more of the school year – remains a persistent challenge in Indiana and is an issue that crosses virtually all of its youth-serving systems. While Indiana's chronic absenteeism rate has decreased, seeing a 1-2% improvement each year since 2022, it remains higher than pre-pandemic.



## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM ISSUE OVERVIEW

Research shows that students who are chronically absent are much less likely to read at grade level and to graduate high school. They also miss out on opportunities to socialize and build strong, trusting relationships with adults and their peers.

Historically, students nationwide were chronically absent for a multitude of reasons: academic struggles, chronic illness, difficulties with food or housing, bullying, caring for a family member, and at-home responsibilities. Students now also identify struggles with mental health, transportation, feeling unsafe in school or disconnected from the academics with no clear pathway to their future.



## PROPOSED CISC POSITION STATEMENT ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

“Due to the importance of consistent engagement and attendance, chronic absenteeism must be recognized as a complex issue that requires a coordinated multi-systemic, multi-agency response to reduce its prevalence and address its underlying causes.”

## IMPLEMENTATION GOALS

Under the leadership of CISC and the Department of Education, and in support of strategic clarity and measurable outcomes, four SMART goals now guide the BEST Youth Initiative's efforts for chronic absenteeism reduction:

- **Establish a statewide chronic absenteeism goal** aligned with accountability systems by January 2026.
- **Develop model attendance meeting practices** that prioritize family engagement and justice system prevention by January 2026.
- **Produce and distribute an attendance resource guidebook** to support schools, caregivers, and community stakeholders by January 2026.
- **Engage youth and families** in the development of attendance solutions as part of the engagement plan under HEA 1098, completed by June 2026.

# Agenda

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## 5. Support of the Child Welfare Task Force Created Under HEA 1273

### a. Presentation on HEA 1273 & potential CISC support

**Action:** Approval of Supportive Relationship

# Agenda

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- 6. Executive Director Report
  - a. CISC 2026-2028 Strategic Plan development update
  - b. Presentation of draft 2025 CISC Annual Report



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# PROPOSED SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHILD WELFARE TASK FORCE

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**MARK FAIRCHILD**, MSW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
COMMISSION ON IMPROVING THE  
STATUS OF CHILDREN IN INDIANA

## HEA 1273: CHILD WELFARE TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

HEA 1273 (2025) established the Child Welfare Task Force to study specified topics regarding child welfare services in Indiana, including:

- Child safety standards pertaining to qualifying as a child in need of services.
- The need for various types of child welfare services in Indiana.
- The need for child welfare service providers in different geographic regions throughout Indiana.
- Methods to assess the quality of child welfare services offered.
- The reasonableness of time for a child in need of services to reach permanency.

The task force is required to submit a report not later than October 15, 2026, and not later than October 15, 2027, for review by the Interim Study Committee on Child Services.

## HEA 1273: CHILD WELFARE TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

Legislated membership of the Task Force would include:

- 5 members of the Senate, one serving as co-chair
- 5 members of the House of Representatives, one serving as co-chair
- A judge appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- A representative of a child placing agency
- An in-home provider or provider of family preservation services
- A representative of child caring institution or a private secure facility
- A group home provider

## HEA 1273: CHILD WELFARE TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

- An older foster youth services provider
- A preventative provider that runs a child welfare program
- A member who is at least 18 years of age and who has lived experience as a child within the child welfare system.
- A juvenile probation officer.
- The director of the Department of Child Services.
- A deputy director of the Department of Child Services.
- The chief of staff or director of the Division of Mental Health and Addiction.

## CISC REQUEST REGARDING HEA 1273

The CISC will commence a supportive relationship to assist the Child Welfare Task Force in accomplishing its deliverables under HEA 1273. This relationship will include in-kind assistance such as:

- **General CISC staff support of the Task Force** such as assistance in organization, communications and member needs related to the assigned activities of the Task Force.
- **Meeting planning related to the Task Force**, including staff assistance in scheduling and managing the logistics of online and in-person meetings.
- **Use of the CISC website for posting meeting materials, agendas and minutes** to ensure member and public access to those items.

# Agenda

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7. Commission member announcements and adjournment

# 2025 Meeting Dates

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- October 15
- December 10