



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana
Wednesday, April 19, 2023
Indiana Government Center South

- 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, joined via Zoom (non-voting member for this meeting)
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Kory George, Chief Probation Officer, Wayne County Probation Department
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Dana Kenworthy, Court of Appeals of Indiana
- Dr. Maria Finnell, (Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary), Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Stephaney Knight, Youth Commission Member
- Dejana Rodriguez, Youth Commission Member

1. Welcome

Senator Donato called the meeting to order at 10:00am and welcomed guests. She welcomed Mark Fairchild, the Commission's new executive director, and Judge Kenworthy to their first official meetings. Judge Kenworthy introduced herself and explained her professional and personal passion for kids and families.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: To approve [minutes from the February meeting](#) was motioned by Bernice Corley, seconded by Judge Kenworthy, and approved unanimously 11-0.

3. Strategic Priority: Child Health and Safety

Dr. Jack Turman, Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Initiative, IUPUI
Presentation: Infant Mortality and Housing

The presentation can be found on slides 3-29 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Dr. Jack Turman introduced himself and shared gratitude for the opportunity to share to the Commission. He introduced his topic, Housing Equity for Infant Health, by sharing the importance of infant and maternal mortality as key indicators of total population health and social well-being. He referenced CDC data that shows zip codes are the strongest determinant of overall health and mentioned his project focuses on neighborhoods and built environments. He shared a testimony of a person experiencing homelessness while pregnant. He shared that 2 Indiana cities rank in the top 15 in evictions. He also shared that housing instability is frequently reported as the number one issue concerning poor pregnancy outcomes. After sharing statistics, Dr. Turman explained the interventions and desired outcomes of the Housing Equity for Infant Health Initiative. He outlined the timeline Healthy Beginnings at Home, with Indiana becoming the second state to incorporate the program which offers rental assistance. He shared supportive data from Ohio's participating group, including reduction in infant loss and low birth weight. The second intervention, Health Justice, helps people who are pregnant with educational opportunities, litigation, and legal analysis. Dr. Turman thanked the many funders and contributors, sharing pride in being the second state to incorporate these interventions.

Discussion: Representative DeVon thanks Dr. Turman for this work and asked who the representative from Notre Dame was that he worked with. Dr. Turman shared that he partnered with the Notre Dame law school but could not remember which professor helped oversee the project. Dr. Box shared congratulations and asked if the interventions are local to only Marion County. Dr. Turman shared that the conditions of the grant included one jurisdiction but that he dreams of this going statewide, especially in rural communities.

Lorraine Cromwell, The Villages

Presentation: Update on Support for Kinship Caregivers

The presentation can be found on slides 30-43 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Lorraine introduced herself and her role at The Villages. She started by showing a video of one of their partnered kinship caregivers. The video can be found [here](#). Lorraine shared the importance and challenges of placing children with kinship caregivers, but included the many ways in which The Villages help support these caregivers. Recently, in partnership with DCS and Casey Family Programs, The Villages met with a large group of kinship caregivers to help assess barriers. One of the many barriers was financial hardship, and Lorraine shared that The Villages has spent the last few months fundraising to support them with rent, utilities, food, and much more. Kinship caregivers are referred by community partners for applications to receive assistance funding. She shared a chart that showed how the funds were divided by type of support, with more than half contributing to housing payments. Lorraine hopes this program and its funding will continue to grow to help kinship caregivers statewide.

Discussion: Dr. Maria Finell asked Lorraine if referrals can come from the healthcare field. Lorraine shared that doctors or other healthcare providers are able to fill out the application.

4. Strategic Priority: Juvenile Justice and Cross System Youth

Justice Steven David

Presentation: Update on the Youth Justice Oversight Committee/1359 Implementation

The presentation can be found on slide 44 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Justice David introduced himself as the chair of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee. He summarized the Committee's overarching goal and complimented the hundreds of people helping with the reviews and recommendations. He shared that their next meeting in May will hold votes for each of their recommendations. He also shared gratitude for the young people who have shared their lived experiences with each workgroup. He hopes this report will identify resources and help the relevant audiences implement best practices. He again thanked the committee's members and all those contributing to the work.

Discussion: Representative DeVon asked about the Youth Justice Oversight Committee's relationship with Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Justice David shared 36 counties are participating in JDAI and

shared his opinion that the YJOC will help bolster JDAI goals. Justice David also joked that he was hoping to ask Kory George for his advice on purchasing a bike.

Julia Stevens, IPDC

Presentation: IPDC At-Risk Youth and Families Project

The presentation can be found on slides 45-57 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Julia introduced herself and shared gratitude to the Commission for the opportunity to speak. She shared that in 2021, the Indiana Public Defender's Council received funding for at-risk youth and families. She shared that the Council had to define that term, and her position trains the public defenders and shares information back and forth with other systemic collaborators. Julia shared some of the barriers to collaboration, which include rural silos, contract implications, shared physical spaces, and lack of multidisciplinary support. She then shared the resources available for IPDC child welfare defense attorneys, which included "Lunch Bunch," continuing education opportunities, and a recently hired social worker. During "Lunch Bunch," a weekly virtual meetup, the attorneys and staff share information and build relationships. Julia also shared multiple partnerships with educational workshops on many topics, including opportunities to hear from those with lived experience. She also included the increase in use of IPDC's research team in case review. Julia concluded by outlining increased partnerships with parent mentors and broader community involvement with DCS, Strengthening Indiana Families, and National Reunification Month. Julia thanked the Commission and shared that anyone can contact her anytime.

Discussion: Representative DeVon shared HB1001 which includes eliminating attorneys. He mentioned that he has received concern about this and was curious if a deeper dive is needed. Julia thanked Representative DeVon for bringing this up and shared that she thinks it will be incredibly disruptive to counties. Senator Donato echoed Representative DeVon's comments. Justin Forkner shared that he had conversations with Senator Ford and wanted to clarify that the line item in HB1001 eliminates DCS in house attorneys.

5. Executive Director and Committee Updates

Mark Fairchild

Mark began by explaining that the Commission is looking to explore its role in relation to legislative items. Tracking current legislation, Mark outlined the details of Senate Bill 1 and 4. These two involve many Commission members and its volunteers in their work with health and behavioral health. He explained SB167 and how it gives Indiana's kids the opportunity to complete their FAFSA. HB1091, which Mark shared he presented to the Commission before his start as executive director, is an example of how the Commission can help vet and endorse bills. He explained that this bill eliminates the waiting period for lawfully residing immigrants for Medicaid and CHIP. He also shared that it helps clarify other health insurance eligibility matters. Mark then referenced the budget bill, which includes funding for staff support for the Commission. He shared that the Commission's website has a tracker that lists relevant bills and their status.

6. Discussion: Future Meeting Topics or other Items from Commission Members

Mark shared that the next meeting would include a youth engagement presentation from Stephaney. Stephaney shared that she and Foster Success will be giving a presentation before the next term of youth representatives begins. Mark shared that Stephaney and Dejuna will be aiding with the next youth member interviews and will hopefully have other roles moving forward as well. Dr. Box shared that other groups that exist should be explored to unite larger advocacy efforts. Senator Donato shared gratitude to Stephaney and Dejuna for all their work.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:23 a.m.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, June 21, 2023, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

