



# Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

## Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana  
Wednesday, October 18, 2023  
Indiana Government Center South

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Shane Hatchett (non-voting member), (Dr. Lindsay Weaver, Indiana State Health Commissioner), Indiana State Department of Health
- Senator Jean Breaux
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, joined via Zoom
- 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. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Eric Miller, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Aly Leonard, Youth Commission Member

### 1. Welcome

Senator Donato called the meeting to order at 10:15am and welcomed guests.

### 2. Consent Agenda

**Action:** To approve the [minutes from the August meeting](#), was approved unanimously 13-0.

### 3. Legislative Affairs Guiding Principles

#### **Mark Fairchild**

The presentation can be found on slides 3-20 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#).

Mark presented guiding principles that will establish a process and provide guidance on what legislative actions are permissible and when further vetting is necessary. Mark stressed that legislative actions must be neutral and factual, connect to the Commission's mission, vision, and overarching principals, foster collaboration, be communicated with pertinent and potentially impacted state agencies or committees, and that any testimony will be performed by the Executive Director or any delegated Commission staff. Mark mentioned that any issues

that may be considered for legislative action should either be vetted by the executive committee and approved by the Commission, or vetted by the executive committee only when timing is not allowed. Mark discerned between legislative action and legislative engagement, and that legislative engagement should be strategized. Mark mentioned the importance of the December and February Commission meetings and how they will help prepare a legislative agenda before session starts. Mark summarized the latest items to be considered.

**Discussion:** Senator Donato suggested moving the February meeting to earlier in the month if legislation needs to be vetted.

**Action:** To approve the [Legislative Affairs Guiding Principles](#), was motioned by Bernice Corley, seconded by Representative DeVon, and approved unanimously 13-0.

#### **4. Family and Youth Engagement Summit Update**

**Blane Cook and Dejuna Rodriguez**

The presentation can be found on slides 21-32 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#).

Blane explained the tentative agenda for the two-day, virtual summit. Day 1 will feature stories from youth and families with lived experience, finishing with an educational piece for professionals about how they can support their communities. Day two will feature advocates and legislators speaking about their experience and how people can reach them and discuss involvement opportunities.

Dejuna gave an overview of items that have been accomplished to make the summit happen, introduced the keynote speakers, gave a history of their qualifications, and discussed the panels and the topics each is designed to address. Dejuna mentioned the desired outcomes of the summit and expressed her eagerness to see the Commission members online at the summit.

**Discussion:** Senator Donato mentioned how successful last year's summit was, and how impactful it was to hear the perspectives of the participating youth. Senator Donato thanked Dejuna and all those involved who were working behind the scenes to make the summit happen. Senator Breaux also thanked Dejuna and mentioned her appreciation for the word "unmuting" and how it implied something significant. Senator Breaux asked for clarification on the role of the youth with lived experience and how they interact with the legislators. Dejuna clarified that through moderated questions, youth will occupy the space to speak on their journey as advocates. Representative Devon reiterated the importance of the opportunity the summit provides. Dejuna signed off by thanking Mark and Blane for the opportunity to still be involved with the Commission through the summit. Senator Donato asked the Commissioners to participate in the summit and stated that Blane will share the link to register.

#### **5. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Subcommittee Report**

**Judge Dowling**

The presentation can be found on slides 33-58 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Judge Dowling introduced herself as the Judge for Delaware Circuit Court 2 as well as the Chair for the CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children) subcommittee. Judge Dowling mentioned that while she speaks about sex trafficking, she is aware through DCS that there is an uptick in labor trafficking cases. Judge Dowling provided definitions for sex and labor trafficking, as well as the Indiana Adult and Juvenile Sex Trafficking Statutes. She stopped to address the use of child prostitution and mentioned that children under the age of 18 cannot be charged with prostitution due to Indiana being a safe harbor state. The use of prostitution in these slides is to create a general understanding of the content included in the presentation. Judge Dowling stated statistics about the growing severity of the trafficking industry and said the industry is growing due to children being a reusable commodity. Judge Dowling called to attention the discrepancy between finding girls as victims more often than boys; Boys are less likely to self-report because they are embarrassed about how they were taken advantage of. Judge Dowling then talked about where trafficking takes place and mentioned that victims neither self-identify nor see themselves as victims because of their close relationship with their perpetrator. She then pivoted to state that healthcare providers can play a critical role in identifying signs of trafficking. Judge Dowling provided facts about screening tools for various fields and provided a healthcare tool to Commission members. Lastly, Judge Dowling stated that she and others are working to get language updated to I.C. 31-34-1-3.5 CHINS that will require an attorney to be appointed to a child alleged to be involved in trafficking, instead of the current state of the

legislation which requires the child to admit or deny the allegations. Further, Judge Dowling mentioned Senator Mike Crider's work towards proposing that nurses receive training that will enhance their ability to identify human trafficking.

**Discussion:** Senator Breaux mentioned she was always under the common impression that transportation was more prevalent. Senator Breaux also asked for clarification on how children are being seen by healthcare providers and asked if it was the perpetrators taking them. Judge Dowling stated it can be the perpetrator, or family members who do not know the child is being trafficked, only that they are ailing. She provided the places where she has trained healthcare providers and mentioned how difficult it is to hear back from providers after soliciting a training opportunity or support. Judge Kenworthy addresses the work Judge Dowling puts into this issue, and asked if Judge Dowling's subcommittee could use other people from different medical backgrounds to help with the workgroups. Judge Dowling stated it would be helpful to have representatives from the medical schools and expressed her desire to train legislators on the matter. She also mentioned the issue of potential trafficking calls being screened out because of a hesitation for a child to hold dual status in probation and DCS. Mark thanked Judge Dowling for her work, the conversation from Commission members, and reiterates the importance of the trafficking issue in Indiana. He then went on to mention that this topic has been pushed along the legislative affairs agenda because of its importance but also because of the Commissions involvement with CHINS 3.5 in the past.

## **6. Executive Director and Committee Updates**

Mark reminded commissioners that the December meeting was moved up to the 6<sup>th</sup> to ensure help with attendance. The meeting will go into detail about the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, highlight state prevention services, and provide an update on the activities of the committees and task forces. Mark mentioned that a new youth representative will be attending the December meeting, and that a reception will be held after the meeting where invited volunteers and others who want to learn more can meet each other and learn about the Commission. The February meeting was moved to the first Wednesday of the month (2/7/23).

## **7. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned, motioned by Eric Miller, and seconded by Kory George.

### **Next Meeting**

Wednesday, December 6, 2023, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.