



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Committee/Task Force:	Juvenile Justice & Cross System Youth Task Force		
Date of Meeting:	2/7/2025	Time:	9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. EDT
Minutes Prepared By:	Blane Cook	Location:	Held Virtually via Zoom

1. Meeting Objective(s)

Learn about appointment of counsel for older youth in the child welfare system and activities of sub-committees. Respond to needs for sub-committee support from the Task Force.

2. Standing Members

Name	Organization	In Attendance (X indicates present)
Steve Balko	Indiana Department of Education (IDOE)	X
Amber Becker	Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), Division of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA)	X
Ann Davis	Indiana Association of Resources and Child Advocacy (IARCA)	
Terrie Decker	Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC)	X
Hon. Kimberly Dowling	Delaware Circuit Court #2	
Tracy Fitz	Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council (IPAC)	
James (Mike) Goodwin	Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS), Sullivan County	
JauNae Hanger	Children's Policy and Law Initiative	
Waylon James	Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS)	X
Jill Johnson	Marion County Public Defender Agency, Juvenile Division	X
Samantha Lewis	Wayne County Probation	
Josh Nichols	Indiana Juvenile Detention Association (IJDA)	X
Kiarra Pearson	Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), Division of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA)	
Leah Pezzarossi	Open Door Youth Services	X
Kaylee Price	Youth Representative	
Colleen Saylor	Indiana Office of Court Services (IOCS)	X
Ellen Sheets	Indiana Criminal Justice Institute (ICJI)	X
Nancy Wever (Co-Chair)	Indiana Office of Court Services (IOCS)	X
Joel Wieneke	Indiana Public Defender Council (IPDC)	X

3. Staff/Guests

Name	Organization
Payton Bowling	Intern, Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana (CISC)
Alyssa Newsom	Intern, Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana (CISC)
Rachel Vilensky	Child Advocates, Inc.
Katie Bollman	Lab for Economic Opportunities, Notre Dame
Sarah Kroeger	Lab for Economic Opportunities, Notre Dame

Cora Haskett	Lab for Economic Opportunities, Notre Dame	
Genevieve Gaines	Child Advocates, Inc.	
Bill Evans	Lab for Economic Opportunities, Notre Dame	
4. Introduction and Check-In		
Result: attendees learn names and roles of those present.		
5. Review and Approve Minutes		
Minutes from 9/6/2024 and 11/1/2024 reviewed and unanimously approved on motion by Jill Johnson and seconded by Joel Wieneke.		
6. Action Items from Last Meeting		
Action	Person/Group Responsible	Status
Prepare and distribute meeting minutes	Nancy Wever	Complete
Send meeting invitations for 2025.	Blane Cook	Complete
Connect with ICJI regarding representative to Task Force	Nancy Wever	Complete
Send information regarding re-authorization of JJDPA	Nancy Wever	Complete

7. Guest Presentation: Counsel for older youth in the child welfare system

Nancy Wever introduced Rachel Vilensky. She is with Child Advocates, Inc. (CA) and has attended meetings of this Task Force (TF) several times. In her work at CA, she has been focused on direct representation by attorneys for youth in the child welfare system. CA has been working with the Lab for Economic Opportunity (LEO) at Notre Dame on a research project about this. Rachel asked to do a presentation for the CISC and Mark sent her our way to vet the concept and presentation, as it is most closely aligned with the goals and objectives of the TF.

Guests/Presenters introduced themselves.

Bill Evans began with background on LEO. It's work is primarily focused on poverty and learning what can move persons out of poverty. Those who have been in the child welfare system are 3X more likely than the general population to be in poverty. LEO conducts research on programs/services offered by local social service providers to understand what works. This is how they became connected with CA.

Rachel advised that CA started a direct representation program in 2022 as a pilot. They have served more than 400 youth, aged 10 or older, in 25 Indiana counties. Youth in the legal system have a constitutional right to counsel, but not so in the child welfare system. Indiana does not have a right to counsel statute for youth in the child welfare system.

Prior research has found that children with direct representation had higher rate of exit to permanency, higher rates of adoption, more motions filed, and more individualized case plans. Another study found that direct representation expedited time to permanency, prevented removals, and decreased moves in school and foster care placements. One study found that direct representation increased the reunification rate and decreased rates of placement and school moves. Implications of these findings include societal costs, e. g., each school move decreases the likelihood of graduation.

CA partnered with LEO in 2023 to research the direct representation program. The research questions are: What is the impact on time to permanency, stability in care, and likelihood of placement in residential treatment facility? Currently, the study is ongoing. LEO hopes to have the study completed by the end of 2026 with results published in the year to year and one-half following completion. Preliminary findings will be shared prior to completion of the full study.

Legislation has been introduced for the past four sessions, but has not passed. There are fiscal implications and an attorney shortage which may be impacting these efforts.

Nancy Wever asked if there is an ask of the TF at this point? Rachel requested to be able to present to the CISC for information sharing purposes. By consensus, the TF determined to request that the group present to the CISC.

8. Task Force Membership

Nancy Wever advised that most agencies/positions on the TF have been filled if a previous member is no longer serving. However, one role is someone from DCS who serves in a policy position. Waylon advised that he could connect with Kate's replacement if/when the position is filled.

9. Sub-Committee Reports

Topic	Main Points	Recommendations/Decisions
Objective #1- CSEC	Neither Co-Chair was present and no report received.	N/A
Objective #2- Status Offense	Leah advised that the sub-committee has not met in a couple of months. The last meetings included presentations from different programs to address Truancy. She plans to connect with Tracy.	N/A
Objective #3- Children with an Incarcerated Parent	Joel advised that the sub-committee is dividing into smaller groups to generate a report for the CISC. He has started drafting a structure for the report.	N/A

Objective #4- Child and Adolescent Development into the Justice System	Nancy provided a report from information received from JauNae. She is looking for a new co-chair for the sub-committee. The legislation they hoped to promote did not move forward (guaranteeing access to family visits/contact for youth in detention facilities). They are still working on establishing a minimum age of jurisdiction for juvenile delinquency proceedings.				N/A
10. Executive Director Update					
Topic	Main Points				Recommendations/Decisions
Update	Neither Mark nor Blane were present. Nancy reminded the TF about the Day of the Child and the Lived Experience Conference events that will take place on February 17 and 18. Reach out if you would like registration information.				N/A
11. Action Items					
Action		Person/Group Responsible		Due Date	
Prepare and distribute minutes		Nancy Wever		Before April meeting	
Request to have CA & LEO present to CISC		Nancy Wever		Before April meeting	
12. Adjournment					
Action				Time	
Meeting adjourned				10:51 a.m.	
13. Next Meeting					
Date:	4/4/2025	Time:	9:30-11:00 EDT	Location:	Online via Zoom
Topics/Objective(s):	Sub-Committee reports and activities.				