



Mike Braun, Governor
State of Indiana

Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services

First Steps

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First Steps Interagency Coordinating Council Meeting

May 6, 2026

10 a.m. - 1 p.m. EDT

Attending ICC Members:

Jennifer Owens (ICC Vice Chair), Cory Best, Jason Berty, Laura Burklew, Mariann Frigo, Alexandra Hall, Charie Jones, Kristi Linson, Courtney Willis (proxy for Adam Alston), Alyssa Christy, Robyn Duffy, Dr. Megan Purcell, Stacey Williams, Laurel Austin, Naomi Dollens, Tanya Merritt-Mulumba, Sonya Rush, Jessica Minor, and Representative Edward Clere

ICC Members not in attendance:

DeAnna Woodruff (ICC Chair), Rachel Foster, Kristi Linson

Attending First Steps State Staff:

Christina Commons, Danielle Ruffino, Constance Young, Amy Torres, Robyn Morton, Jamie Le Sesne Spears, Rachel Turner, Marie-Therese Smith, and Regina Snyder

Welcome and Roll Call:

Jennifer Owens, ICC Vice Chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Attendance was taken via roll call.

Family Story

Tiffany Waymire shared her family's experience with First Steps, describing how the program supported her son Jackson from 14 months through an autism diagnosis at 30 months and into ABA therapy. She emphasized First Steps' role in helping the family access evaluations, secure therapy services, and transition into preschool, noting the significant positive impact on their overall journey.

Approval of January 2026 Minutes

Jennifer Owens called for a motion to approve the January meeting minutes. Cory Best moved to approve the minutes, the motion was seconded by Sonya Rush and passed unanimously.

First Steps Update

Christina Commons delivered a high-level quarterly First Steps Update. She provided a brief update on the First Steps program structure and staffing, noting statewide capacity across local offices, provider agencies, and independent providers, as well as seasonal fluctuations in referrals. Key referral and outcome trends were shared, highlighting a significant drop-off between referral and evaluation stages, with most children who are evaluated found eligible and subsequently receiving services. The discussion focused on barriers to completing evaluations, particularly low response rates to unfamiliar outreach and limitations of indirect referral pathways along with opportunities to improve tracking of children who do not complete the process and to strengthen coordination with pediatric practices through more integrated referral systems. She concluded her presentation by sharing program projects and priority areas.

2026 Legislative Session Update

Representative Clere provided a brief legislative update, noting recent political developments in Indiana, noting Republican primary outcomes and their indication of continued volatility within state government dynamics. Rep. Clere emphasized the importance of voting and advocacy. He encouraged First Steps stakeholders to engage with

legislators and share stories over the next six months leading into the January budget session. He also announced his intention to run for mayor of New Albany as an independent candidate, while reaffirming his continued commitment to First Steps and potential future collaboration with the ICC and the Bureau of Child Development Services.

ICC Bylaws

Jennifer provided an update on the ICC bylaws, highlighting three key revisions: the addition of term limits, updated participation requirements, and the replacement of standing committees with a nominating committee. The revised bylaws were approved by the membership.

ICC Highlight and Partner Collaboration

Eden Bezy shared an update on Indiana's Rural Health Transformation Grant, which is providing \$207 million in its first year to strengthen rural health systems through a coordinated set of statewide initiatives. The work focuses on improving access, quality, and coordination of care through enhanced care coordination, expanded telehealth and workforce capacity, improved health system interoperability, and targeted improvements in rural emergency and specialty care. The initiative is also establishing regional coalitions across the state to engage local partners in identifying and addressing community health priorities, supported by a structured statewide governance and funding process with upcoming application deadlines.

BCDS Procedural Safeguards Update

The Bureau's Policy and Family Engagement Manager, Jamie Le Sesne Spears, provided an update on the recently revised First Steps procedural safeguards and dispute resolution options for early intervention services. She shared the Bureau has released a family-facing guide outlining rights and procedural safeguards, development of updated forms and resources, and ongoing training for families on how to access and understand safeguards. She provided a high-level review of family rights outlined in the procedural safeguards and encouraged all ICC members to review the document. Additional work is underway to translate materials into multiple languages and to continue training mediators and hearing officers. Jamie also reviewed the four available dispute resolution options for families, emphasizing efforts to improve accessibility and ensure families are clearly informed of their rights and available pathways for resolution.

Q2 Strategic Work Session: ICC Advocacy

During the Strategic Work Session on ICC Advocacy, Dr. Renae Azziz led a discussion on family rights and family survey data, including key rights such as prior written notice, language access, and participation in IFSP meetings. The group reviewed disaggregated survey results across key domains and discussed using ORID methodology to better interpret trends beyond "extremely helpful" ratings, with attention to limitations of small sample sizes. The conversation also explored shifting toward more frequent, formative data collection, clarified the intended summative use of exit surveys, and identified next steps related to improving reporting, addressing participation barriers, and incorporating ICC feedback into the governor's report process.

Public Comment

Megan Hershey opened the floor for council members' comments and no public comments were made.

Adjournment

Jennifer Owens requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made and seconded. The motion passed, and the meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Next Meeting

August 12, 2026

10 a.m. - 1 p.m. EDT

Location: Easterseals Crossroads 4740 Kingsway Drive Indianapolis, IN 46205 Conf. Room 5th Floor

Minutes were respectfully submitted by Megan Hershey, Transform Consulting Group

