

**Strengthening Families Act Committee Meeting**

November 1, 2017  
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Southeast Community College, Rooms V-103 & 104  
8800 O Street, Lincoln, NE 68520

**I. Call to Order**

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The Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee of the Nebraska Children’s Commission was called to order at 1:15 p.m. by Co-Chairs Sarah Helvey and Vernon Davis.

**II. Roll Call and Introductions**

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***Committee Members present (12):***

Payne Ackerman	Vernon Davis	Sarah Helvey
Cassy Blakely	Jude Dean	Nikki Novak
Deanna Brakhage*	Patricia Frost (arrived at 1:31)	Lisa Story
Heather Colton	Kim Hawekotte	Juliet Summers (arrived at 2:35)

***Committee Members absent (6):***

Erin Bader	Anna Brummer	Nicole Seymour
Ashley Brown	Nathan Collier	Deb Shuck

***Ex Officio and Resource Members present (2):***

Jim Bennett	A’Jamal Byndon
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***Ex Officio and Resource Members absent (2):***

Timoree Klingler	Deb VanDyke-Ries
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**A quorum was established.**

\*Let it be noted for the record that Deanna Brakhage was temporary proxy designated by Stacy Scholten.

***Guests in Attendance (7):***

Crystal Aldmeyer.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Erin Aliano.....	Nebraska Alliance of CACs
Ivy Bloom.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Bethany Connor Allen.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Joseph Dalton.....	Seward County Attorney’s Office
Amanda Felton.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Jolene Palmer.....	Nebraska Department of Education

***a. Notice of Publication***

Recorder for the meeting, Amanda Felton, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar website in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication will be kept as a permanent attachment with the meeting minutes.

***b. Announcement of the placement of Open Meetings Act information***

A copy of the Open Meetings Act was available for public inspection and was located on the sign in table to the side of the meeting room.

**III. Approval of Agenda**

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**It was moved by Kim Hawekotte to approve the agenda as presented. Cassy Blakely seconded the motion.** There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

Payne Ackerman  
Cassy Blakely  
Deanna Brakhage\*  
Heather Colton

Vernon Davis  
Jude Dean  
Kim Hawekotte  
Sarah Helvey

Nikki Novak  
Lisa Story

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (8)**

Erin Bader  
Ashley Brown  
Anna Brummer

Nathan Collier  
Patricia Frost  
Nicole Seymour

Deb Shuck  
Juliet Summers

**ABSTAINED (0)**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

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It was moved by Cassy Blakely and seconded by Lisa Story to approve the minutes of the August 11, 2017 meeting as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

Payne Ackerman  
Cassy Blakely  
Deanna Brakhage\*  
Heather Colton

Vernon Davis  
Jude Dean  
Kim Hawekotte  
Sarah Helvey

Nikki Novak  
Lisa Story

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (8)**

Erin Bader  
Ashley Brown  
Anna Brummer

Nathan Collier  
Patricia Frost  
Nicole Seymour

Deb Shuck  
Juliet Summers

**ABSTAINED (0)**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**V. Co-Chair Report**

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Co-Chairs Helvey and Davis, thanked member for attending and for the work they had done in the past year. Pamphlet

**VI. Department of Health and Human Services Update**

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Deanna Brakhage, Program Specialist with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), provided the Committee with an update on the Department’s implementation of the SFA. Brakhage noted that all normalcy plans were due to the department as of October 31<sup>st</sup>, and that Stacy Scholten would be able to provide additional information on them at the next meeting. If any group homes or shelters did not follow through, the department can ask for contract monitoring in order to into the facilities and do a more in depth review of practices.

Regulations for training on trafficking were still in draft form due to the [Governor’s Executive Order](#). A training webinar on trafficking had been created by Ivy Bloom, Program Specialist with DHHS, DCFS. The webinar had been made available to all providers to share with their agency based foster homes. The webinar would also be made available on a trafficking page that would be available on the DHHS website in the coming months. Brakhage also informed members that DCFS [Protection and Safety Procedure #20-2017](#) had gone into effect on September 11<sup>th</sup>, regarding missing youth and the distribution of photos.

**VII. Court Improvement Project – Know Your Rights Guide**

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Traci Webber, Design and Communications Coordinator with the Court Improvement Project (CIP), introduced herself and provided information on the progress of the updated Know Your Rights Guide. Collaboration had been in progress

with the Youth Citizen Review Panel in order to ensure youth input on the updates. In the initial meetings, the purpose, format, and distribution of the document were discussed. Various formats had been discussed including a comprehensive printed packet, a collection of separate printed publications that could either be presented overtime or as needed, and a digital packet available online. Co-Chair Helvey thanked Webber for her time and offered the Community and Family Voice subcommittee as a resource that could be reactivated to assist with the project.

## **VIII. Probation Update**

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An update on Juvenile Probation's implementation of the SFA was given by Jim Bennett, Director of Supervision Services. Bennett informed members that a policy had been implemented and training had begun regarding the distribution of photos for missing youth. He also noted the work happening to bring about a shift in culture when viewing missing youth. Collaboration between Juvenile Probation and YouthThrive was in progress to create a youth council. There was also work happening to utilize a world café format to gather feedback from youth as well as the implementation of exit surveys for youth to help shape the direction of the system moving forward.

## **IX. Approval of Reports**

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### *a. Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) Subcommittee*

A brief [presentation](#) and review of the [APPLA Subcommittee report](#) was given by the group's Chair, Crystal Aldmeyer. She explained that the work of the committee had focused heavily on the emotional and legal permanency of foster youth, both with the permanency plan of APPLA and otherwise. The three main goals outlined were to include youth voice in determining and achieving permanency goals, taking a team approach to determining and achieving permanency goals; and promoting best practices for implementation of APPLA provisions in the State and Federal Strengthening Families Act.

Members discussed the process and complications of putting together the members of the staffings to discuss permanency. The issue of Transitional Living Plans (TLPs) was also brought up. It was agreed that the TLPs were not as comprehensive as they needed to be to ensure youth were gaining the necessary life skills to transition into a successful adulthood. Issues of implementation, distribution to court professionals, and use in relative and kinship homes would need to be looked at more in depth in the next year. Other next steps for the group included focusing on access to first jobs and the needs of pregnant and parenting youth.

### *b. Trafficking Subcommittee Report*

An update on the work of the Trafficking Subcommittee was provided by Subcommittee Co-Chairs, Nikki Novak and Erin Aliano. The Co-Chairs referred members to the [draft report](#) noting the priorities of strengthening the system to minimize victimization for system involved youth, monitoring and making recommendations to ensure that the implementation of the Federal and State Strengthening Families Acts support the prevention of trafficking, and the creation and support of collaborative approaches to trafficking.

Concern was raised regarding Appendix C within the report by Deanna Brakhage. She explained that a report to the hotline would result in a safety assessment only if the trafficking perpetrator was a caretaker, and would not apply to third party perpetrators. She went on to note that DHHS interpreted the statute that priority one filing with the hotline and safety assessment would only occur for third party perpetrators if law enforcement were to take the child into protective custody. However a majority of the subcommittee had not agreed with this interpretation and had moved forward with the recommendation that all calls from law enforcement regarding trafficking should be accepted as priority one with an investigation happening within 24 hours regardless if the perpetrator was a caretaker or third party. Members of the Committee agreed that this was best practice.

### *c. Annual Report Review*

The Co-Chairs directed attention to the [Strengthening Families Act Committee draft annual report](#). They welcomed any final discussion prior to entertaining a motion. **It was moved by Cassy Blakely to approve the APPLA Subcommittee, Trafficking Subcommittee, and Strengthening Families Act Committee annual reports in their entirety as presented. Heather Colton seconded the motion.** There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

Cassy Blakely  
Heather Colton  
Vernon Davis  
Jude Dean

Patricia Frost  
Kim Hawekotte  
Sarah Helvey  
Nikki Novak

Lisa Story  
Juliet Summers

**AGAINST (1):**

Deanna Brakhage\*

**ABSENT (6)**

Erin Bader  
Ashley Brown

Anna Brummer  
Nathan Collier

Nicole Seymour  
Deb Shuck

**ABSTAINED (1)**

Payne Ackerman

**MOTION CARRIED**

**X. Court Implementation Subcommittee Update**

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An update on the newly formed Court Implementation Subcommittee was given by its Co-Chair Heather Colton. She informed the group that there had been a lot of feedback expressing a lack of familiarity with the SFA by many attorneys and judges throughout the state. Other issues the Subcommittee planned to look into included the lack of information on SFA included in the court reports, youth attendance in court, navigating the complications of continued involvement in extracurricular activities when transitioning back home, ensuring youth received required documents as outlined in the SFA, and working to update the youth court questionnaire.

**XI. New Business**

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There was no new business to present.

**XII. Public Comment**

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The Co-Chairs invited any members of the public to speak. No public comment was given.

**XIII. Next Steps**

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*a. Upcoming Meeting Planning*

The members discussed potential meeting dates for the 2018 calendar year. It was agreed that a survey should go out to members with hopes of finding a quarterly meeting time that would work best.

**XIV. Adjournment**

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Cassy Blakely moved to adjourn the meeting. Payne Ackerman seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 3:16 p.m.

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