

Nebraska Children’s Commission Meeting

February 14, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Online

and

Nebraska State Office Building

301 Centennial Mall South

Lincoln, NE 68508

1. Call to Order

Chair Misty Flowers welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She asked attendees to introduce themselves. Roll call was taken by Adam Anderson through introductions.

2. Introductions and Roll Call

Commission Members Present (14)

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Jarren Breeling | Ron Giesselmann | Felicia Nelsen |
| A’Jamal Byndon | Richard Hasty | Lana Temple-Plotz |
| Kathy Dinkel | Sara Hoyle (9:44 a.m.) | Susan Thomas (9:30 a.m.) |
| Misty Flowers | Terri Knutson | LaShawn Young (9:44 a.m.) |
| Rachael Folds | Melissa Nance | |

Commission Members Absent (1)

Vernon Davis

Commission Ex-Officio Members Present (5)

| | | |
|--|----------------------|------------------|
| Proxy for Jeanne Brandner, Julie Smith | Monika Gross | Deb VanDyke-Ries |
| Jennifer Carter | Judge Roger Heideman | |
| | LaDonna Jones-Dunlap | |

Commission Ex-Officio Members Absent (1)

Senator Myron Dorn

Roll call was taken through introductions, and a quorum was established.

Guests in Attendance (5)

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Amanda Adams..... | Nebraska Children’s Commission |
| Adam Anderson..... | Nebraska Children’s Commission |
| Dannette Smith..... | Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services |
| Michaela Hirschman..... | Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services |
| Ivy Svoboda..... | Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers |

a. Notice of Publication

Recorder for the meeting, Adam Anderson, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar and Nebraska Children’s Commission websites in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication would 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 at the sign-in table and on the Children’s Commission Website.

3. Approval of the Agenda

It was moved by Lana Temple-Plotz and seconded by Felicia Nelsen to approve the agenda as presented.

There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (11):

Jarren Breeling
A'Jamal Byndon
Kathy Dinkel
Misty Flowers

Rachael Folds
Ron Giesselmann
Richard Hasty
Terri Knutson

Melissa Nance
Felicia Nelsen
Lana Temple-Plotz

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (0):

ABSENT (4):

Vernon Davis
Sara Hoyle

Susan Thomas
LaShawn Young

MOTION CARRIED

Note that the order of items in the minutes will not be reflective of the original agenda

4. Approval of the Consent Agenda

- a. [November 1, 2022 Meeting Minutes](#)
- b. [Member Nomination Report](#)
- c. [Co-Chair Nomination Report](#)

It was moved by Richard Hasty and seconded by Felicia Nelsen to approve the Consent Agenda items.

There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (11):

Jarren Breeling
A'Jamal Byndon
Kathy Dinkel
Misty Flowers

Rachael Folds
Ron Giesselmann
Richard Hasty
Terri Knutson

Melissa Nance
Felicia Nelsen
Lana Temple-Plotz

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (0):

ABSENT (4):

Vernon Davis
Sara Hoyle

Susan Thomas
LaShawn Young

MOTION CARRIED

5. Executive Committee Update

Vice Chair Melissa Nance discussed the work of the Executive Committee in trying to focus the engagement of the Commission members. She noted as a part of this work, the Executive Committee will be meeting monthly to discuss current issues and items for the upcoming meetings. Nance reminded the Commission regarding the past work done on developing the strategic plan and the work that will be completed during the meeting. Vice Chair Nance also noted the procedure for designating a proxy for quorum and voting purposes. She clarified that if any member is unable to attend that they may designate a proxy by emailing Adam Anderson and sharing the name of the person with him. She continued that the proxy may be informed of a member's voting instructions and anything a member may wish to share with the group. Adam Anderson shared additional thoughts about the process.

6. Legislative Update

Policy Analyst, Amanda Adams shared an update regarding a few of the legislative bills of importance that the Commission is tracking on its [Bill Tracker](#). She shared information regarding LB 14, which is a bill that would expand the Bridge to Independence program to include certain youth from Probation. She noted that this provision had previously been supported by the Commission, and she intends to find a member to testify on behalf of the Commission. Adams continued, by discussing LB 306, which creates a youth in care bill of rights. She noted that this legislation previously had the support of the Commission and that Payne Ackerman from the SFA Committee will testify in support. Adams discussed LB 435, which provides parental advisor from the judicial branch to assist in navigating the child welfare system. Adams suggested supporting this legislation with a letter. Adams also discussed LB 490 which provides provider rate increases of 10% from 2023-2024 and 7% for 2024-2025. Adams discussed LB 159, which provides grant opportunities to graduated foster youth, and she suggests supporting with a letter. Lastly, Adams discussed LB 509 and 510 that provide reimbursement rates for child welfare services. She has reached out to the bill introducer's offices for input about how the Commission can assist.

A'Jamal Byndon discussed bills regarding racial impact statements for legislative bills, youth being expelled from schools and additional juvenile justice bills that have impact on people of color. He hoped that the Commission could go on record supporting more legislation dealing with racial and ethnic disparities rather than just continuing to monitor bills that affect children. Amanda Adams responded that some of the legislation Byndon discussed is being tracked and will be discussed at the various workgroups of the Commission's Committees. Kathy Dinkel expressed support for legislation regarding expulsion but thought the support could go further as to suggest solutions for the problems and how the Commission can assist. Richard Hasty agreed that supporting with feedback would be helpful. Julie Smith shared some information regarding a program that was implemented that dropped referrals and suspensions by 96%. LaDonna Jones-Dunlap agreed with the discussion and asked for more information from Smith regarding that program that dropped the suspension rate.

Amanda Adams discussed the process of how bills get pulled for discussion at the Commission level and what might be helpful moving forward. Chair Flowers discussed reviving the Legislative Committee prior to the next meeting, and that Committee would be responsible for setting levels of support via testimony, letter, or if there is already support. Flowers encouraged anyone interested in the Legislative Committee to send their names to Adams or Anderson.

7. DHHS Update

DHHS CEO Dannette Smith shared information regarding a recent community forum revolving around enhancing public health strategies to enhance early learning programs. She noted a follow-up meeting is scheduled for March 15th. Smith also shared that the department brought together a community group to discuss behavioral health issues for children who are or have the potential to be involved in the child welfare system. She noted this group looked at children that may have mental health needs unrelated to coming into care and how to identify the right assessment for those that have behavioral health needs. She also noted that another team will be focused on preventing children from entering the system.

CEO Smith continued by updating the Commission on the status of LB 1173 from 2022 which began the prior week. Nearly 100 persons participated virtually and in person. She shared that the specifics of LB 1173 require DHHS to develop a practice and finance model. She thanked the partners from Judicial and Legislative branches for their

efforts. She noted the need for more individuals with lived experience at the table. Additionally, she noted that there is a place on the DHHS website for more information regarding the workgroup and that all the meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act. She shared that a plan is to be presented to the Legislature in December.

Smith shared information regarding the restructuring of DHHS. In conjunction with that restructuring, she has asked the Stevens Group to examine the organization structure of CFS in an effort to get the right leader for DHHS based on that organizational structure. She also noted the same process for Behavioral Health.

Michaela Hirschman shared information regarding the Request for Proposal posted in search of innovative services for families. She shared how that process will affect some of the issues that have arisen in the last few years regarding services.

A'Jamal Byndon noted that credible messengers to engage the communities affected and those that are directly impacted are missing from the conversation. CEO Smith acknowledged that the 1173 Committee is lacking voices from the community, but she noted she will be working to bring community voice to the table.

8. Strategic Priorities and Core Values

Richard Hasty began the discussion by sharing a copy of the [Strategic Plan](#). He reminded the Commission regarding the history and process of developing the strategic plan through input at the meetings, survey feedback, and review by the Executive Committee. He noted that through discussion it was identified to take three of the ideas with the most amount of feedback and ability to effect change as strategic priorities and to take two of the items to develop core values. Amanda Adams noted that the items drafted in the Strategic Plan came from the prior discussion and brainstorming. Members discussed adding language regarding data, tracking progress, assigning tasks to committees, and evidence-based language for certain goals.

It was moved by A'Jamal Byndon and seconded by Susan Thomas to approve the Strategic Plan with changes as discussed. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (12):

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Jarren Breeling | Rachael Folds | Melissa Nance |
| A'Jamal Byndon | Ron Giesselmann | Felicia Nelsen |
| Kathy Dinkel | Richard Hasty | Lana Temple-Plotz |
| Misty Flowers | Sara Hoyle | Susan Thomas |

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (0):

ABSENT (3):

| | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Vernon Davis | Terri Knutson | LaShawn Young |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|

MOTION CARRIED

9. Probation Update

Julie Smith provided an update to the Commission regarding the recent work of Probation. She noted that Probation has been working with RFK on a statewide system assessment and that report is in. She shared that the leadership team and Supreme Court will be working to prioritize the recommendations from the report. Smith noted that it will be shared once it becomes available.

10. NEOC Hearing from 1/20/23

Monika Gross shared information from the NEOC hearing regarding the complaint filed on May of 2022. She noted that the NEOC found no reasonable cause for the discrimination allegations. She also added that the NEOC found that the Commission is not subject to the provisions of the public accommodations law as it is not an entity as defined by the statute, and rather is established to perform examination of particular responses and actions of a state agency, and in this situation subject to the Open Meetings Act, which the NEOC does not have jurisdiction. Members discussed the history of the allegations.

11. Commission Membership & Vacancies

Adam Anderson shared a link to the [Governor's Website](#) for appointment application to the Commission. He noted that all member terms on the Children's Commission will expire on June 30, 2023, and that application for reappointment will need to be made. He shared that there will be one more meeting before terms expire and that Amanda Adams will be in touch with the Governor's Office to hopefully announce new appointments at one time, rather than in smaller batches as it happened in the past.

12. Committee Update & Chair Vacancies

Adam Anderson noted that no members volunteered prior to the meeting for the vacant Co-Chair positions on the B2i and SFA Committee, but if members would like to volunteer, they may reach out to him.

Alternative Response Committee

AR Co-Chair Monika Gross noted that the AR Committee has not met since September, however they have newly formed workgroups that will be looking at oversight, workforce stability, equitable provision of services, and legal services. Jennifer Carter shared information regarding the work of the Oversight Workgroup, which has been working to examine what oversight mechanisms exist for AR and Non-court cases.

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee:

Amanda Adams shared that through the recommendations of the B2i Committee, DHHS is working on a special unit to help better transition kids into and exiting from B2i. Additionally, she shared that DHHS is also working on Youth Thrive implementation that will begin in April.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee:

FCRRC Co-Chair Felicia Nelsen shared that the FCRRC is beginning work on the 2024 report that is due to the legislature. She noted that the previous workgroups have been reconvene and members added, that will be meeting over the next several months to be looking at Treatment Family Care, agency administrative and support rates, and base rates for foster and adoptive parents. She added that the group will also be looking at LB 509 and 510 to see how that will affect rates and how to work with the legislature on them.

Juvenile Services Committee:

JSC Co-Chair Deb VanDyke-Ries shared information regarding the recent work of the JSC Committee. She noted that the most active of the three workgroups of the JSC Committee is the Access to Treatment Services Workgroup which has identified six overarching solutions to overcome barriers impacting access to treatment services in Nebraska. She shared that those solutions will focus on improving timely access to a robust continuum of treatment services, address compensation and training to attract and retain a highly skilled network of providers, incentivized collaboration on complex case, evaluating funding structures and rate increases, access to individual and family supports necessary to serve youth at home and in the community safely, and evaluate the intersection of mental health and prevention services to improve future outcomes. A'Jamal Byndon asked if there was data that the group is looking at in terms of access to treatment services. Treatment Services Workgroup Chair, Julie Smith responded that the workgroup is currently focused on identifying barriers and outcomes, and then the workgroup will determine what data is necessary to evaluate.

Strengthening Families Act Committee:

SFA Co-Chair Misty Flowers shared the recent updates from the SFA Committee, noting that Payne Ackerman has just been voted in as Co-Chair, however the SFA Committee still needs to fill the other position, as she is planning to step away from her Co-Chair position. Flower noted that the SFA has been working on strategic priorities, and some movement has been made with DHHS regarding the SFA's recommendation of Independent Living Champion

Specialists with the department. She also noted that work has been done on the Normalcy and Trafficking Subcommittees.

13. Public Comment

Chair Flowers opened the floor for public comment. There was none.

14. New Business

A'Jamal Byndon shared that he would like to see the Commission host a community forum or listening sessions once a year, to help people understand more of what the Commission does and share any feedback, and he would be willing to volunteer to facilitate. Chair Flowers noted that this will be discussed at the upcoming Executive Committee meetings.

Kathy Dinkel added information regarding those that are involved in the system have a hard time knowing where to share their concerns. Jarren Breeling noted the new Family Advocacy Unit at DHHS would be interested in hearing feedback from families that are going through the system to engage the voices of lived experience.

15. Upcoming Meeting Planning

- a. May 9, 2023, will be held in person at a location yet to be determined.
- b. August 8, 2023
- c. November 14, 2023

16. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Anderson