



## **Consent Agenda**

A consent agenda is a meeting practice which packages routine committee reports, Board meeting minutes, and other non-controversial items not requiring discussion or independent action as one agenda item. This can save precious meeting time by allowing the Board to approve this 'package' of items together in one motion.

Reports and information can be grouped together under a consent agenda only if all Board Directors agree. If only one Director selects a specific item for discussion, it must be removed and placed on the regular Board meeting agenda. Depending upon the organization, a few minutes up to a half hour can be freed up for more substantial discussion on those items requiring strategic thought, decision making or action.

### **What types of items can be found on the consent agenda?**

Typical consent agenda items are routine and should not require any Board discussion. Typically the following things are considered for grouping in consent agenda.

- ★ Board and committee meeting minutes
- ★ Committee and staff reports
- ★ Updates or background reports provided for information only
- ★ Correspondence requiring no action
- ★ Staff appointment requiring Board confirmation
- ★ Final approval of proposals or reports that Directors have been dealing with for some time and are familiar with the implications
- ★ Routine contracts that fall within policies and guidelines.
- ★ Confirmation of documents or items that need no discussion but are required by the bylaws

### **How does a Board begin using a consent agenda?**

The first step in using a consent agenda is to have the Board approve a motion to adopt the consent agenda format for Board meetings. The Board should also craft and approve a policy of what may or may not be included in the consent portion of the agenda.

It is important to make sure that all Directors know what items belong on the consent portion of the agenda, and how to move items to and from this overall consent area.

### **What is the process for using a consent agenda?**

A consent agenda can only work if the reports and items are known in advance and distributed with the agenda package allowing sufficient time to be read by all Directors prior to the meeting. A typical process for developing and using a consent agenda is as follows:

- ★ The President or Chairperson of the Board decides what items will be placed into the consent portion of the agenda.
- ★ The full agenda, including consent items are disseminated prior to the Board meeting along with any documentation or back up information so that Board Directors can do their due diligence before voting.
- ★ As the first item of business, the President/Chairperson asks Directors if any one wishes to remove any item under the consent portion of the agenda to be discussed. They can request to discuss the item, question the item or register a vote against the item.
- ★ If an item is removed from the consent portion, the President/Chairperson will place it on the regular meeting agenda.
- ★ The Chairperson then asks for a motion to accept the consent agenda.

The consent agenda items typically appear very near the beginning of the regular meeting. This allows any item to be removed and placed into the overall agenda for discussion and action late in the meeting. As with all formal Board action, a quorum must be present in order to have action on the consent agenda items that is legitimate and binding.

#### **Sample of a Consent Agenda**

- I. Welcome
  - II. Consent Agenda
    - a. Board meeting minutes
    - b. Contract to retain HR Consultant
    - c. Marketing Committee meeting minutes and report
    - d. Executive Director's report
  - III. Finance Report
  - IV. Discussion Item
    - Change recommendation for XYZ Program
- and so on.....

As a single item on the agenda, the consent agenda is voted on with a single vote - to approve the consent agenda. The key to the Consent Agenda's effectiveness is that there is NO DISCUSSION of that item.

The motion sounds like this:

Dick: I move to approve the consent agenda.

Sue: I'll second that motion.

Chair: There is a motion and a second to approve the consent agenda. All in favor signify by saying "Aye."

Again, because there will be no discussion of these items individually, using a consent agenda requires that Board materials be provided in plenty of time for Directors to read them all. It is a requirement that the Directors read these materials before the meeting.

### **Handling Items That Require Clarification or Discussion**

Sometimes a board member will read the board materials related to the Consent Agenda, and he will have a question he would like answered before he votes. Or he feels the issue still requires discussion before he would feel comfortable voting. Those are two distinct scenarios, and they receive two distinct treatments.

### **Items for Clarification or Questions**

For items that require clarification, or for which a board member has a question, that clarification must be requested before the meeting. An item cannot be pulled from the consent agenda just to have a question answered. That sort of information gathering should happen ONLY before the meeting.

In that way, the person being asked the question has time to gather the information. (There is nothing worse than having an issue tabled for the next meeting, only because a question could not be answered then and there.) In addition, that clarification can then be sent to all board members, so everyone has the same information before the meeting.

This is particularly useful for clarifying the minutes, which often takes absurd amounts of time that could otherwise be spent in more meaningful discussion.

### **Items for Discussion**

If there is an item about which a board member disagrees, or believes that item requires discussion, then a request is made at the board table to pull that one item from the Consent Agenda, and to add it to the regular agenda as an item to be discussed. The remainder of the Consent Agenda items are voted on and approved, and only that single item is held out for discussion.

“Ms. Chairwoman, I would like to request that the Item ‘c’ be pulled from the Consent Agenda for discussion.”

“All in favor of approving the Consent Agenda, minus Item ‘c,’ signify by saying Aye.”

Item ‘C’ will then be discussed as a regular discussion item.

## **Nebraska Children's Commission Workforce Workgroup**

**March 17, 2015**

The Workforce workgroup of the Nebraska Children's Commission has identified two key areas of focus to recruit and retain Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) child welfare caseworkers in Nebraska: increased salary and compensation and the development of career trajectories. Increasing the professionalism and expectations of front line workers and their supervisors is critical to improving outcomes for children in out-of-home care and in the juvenile justice system. Recommendations are listed in priority order.

### **Role and Importance of Child Welfare Workers**

Child welfare caseworkers are critical to the safety, permanency and well-being of children in Nebraska. Caseworkers must be given the tools necessary to effectively perform their jobs and help vulnerable children and families.

Studies abound on the importance of stable and effective caseworkers. The Foster Care Review Office recently cited two studies in its 2014 annual report, noting that caseworker turnover is consistently associated with delays in achieving permanency and increased numbers of placement.

Caseworkers also play a pivotal role in the experience of the child, especially when the child is in an out-of-home placement. Children experiencing the upheaval of being removed from the home need stable and caring adults in their lives. The repeated change of caseworkers removes an important opportunity to provide vulnerable children with much needed stability and certainty.

The average length of tenure for a caseworker in Nebraska is 3.19 years. This not only leaves a vulnerable population of state wards facing the decreased outcomes associated with caseworker changes, but also imposes a significant fiscal cost on the state. Training associated with hiring a new caseworker ranges between \$30,000 and \$36,000.

### **Salary and Compensation**

Improved salary and compensation should include bringing caseworker salaries in line with national averages and creating salary differentials. Salary differentials should be available for performance and education. Performance incentives include an increased salary differential for achieving key competencies in casework. Caseworkers should also continue to receive salary increases when moving from frontline casework to mentor and supervisor roles.

Educational incentives include a salary differential for attaining higher education and loan forgiveness programs. Tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness is a sub-topic of compensation that is closely linked to retention and recruitment. Higher loan forgiveness for caseworkers employed in underserved areas assists in rural communities attracting and retaining child welfare professionals.

**Recommendations:**

1. Caseworker salaries should be brought in line with regional averages, taking into account variations in caseworker education, experience, and caseload.
2. A loan forgiveness program for attainment of higher education should be established, with higher loan forgiveness for employment in underserved areas and rural areas.
3. A comprehensive Interim Study regarding child welfare caseworker professionals should be undertaken by the Legislature and include the issue of caseworker salary in Nebraska.

**Education and Professionalism**

The role of child welfare caseworker is of critical importance, and should not be considered an entry level position. Caseworkers are in charge of ensuring that families and children receive services and support and making recommendations to the Judge regarding permanency. It is clear that this pivotal role requires attaining high levels of competency through education, training and experience. It is important to encourage caseworkers to attain levels of higher education, including the attainment of a Master's of Social Work. Incentives may include a salary differential for attaining higher education, loan forgiveness programs, or tuition reimbursement.

**Recommendations:**

1. A comprehensive Interim Study regarding child welfare caseworker professionals should be undertaken by the Legislature and include the issue of incentives to encourage the attainment of advanced degrees, including through loan forgiveness programs.

**Career Trajectories**

Establishment of career trajectories strengthens retention and professional development. Caseworkers should receive increased salaries for performance and supervisory duties. New job classifications can be based on achievement of key competencies with salary increases at each level. Competencies may include the ability to work with specific populations, maintain high-risk caseloads, attain cultural competency, or speak multiple languages.

**Recommendations:**

1. Career steps should be identified with accompanying salary differentials for:
  - a. Achieving specialized competencies (expertise with specific populations; high risk caseloads; cultural competency; multiple language proficiency);
  - b. When moving from frontline casework to mentor to supervisor roles; and
  - c. Education achievement beyond bachelor's degree.
2. Encourage and support the continued efforts of the DHHS and NFC.

**Caseloads**

Caseload sizes have dramatic effects for both workers and the families they serve. A burdensome caseload is the natural consequence of increased turnover, which in turn creates even more turnover when workers feel they are unable to appropriately manage their caseloads. Caseloads are not just abstract numbers; each case represents the lives of families and children. When caseworkers are assigned too many cases they are overwhelmed, lose their confidence in their ability to effectively perform their jobs, and children and families suffer the effects.

The Workforce workgroup acknowledges the work that has been done by the Legislature in the important step of creating caseload limits for child welfare case workers. DHHS and pilot project Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC) are required by Neb. Rev. Stat. §68-1207(1) to utilize the workload standards of the Child Welfare League of America. DHHS submits an annual report to the legislature outlining the caseloads of its caseworkers

It is important to perform oversight of these numbers, to ensure compliance. One area that can be improved upon is defining vague terms in the caseload standards. Urban, rural, and mixed urban and rural caseload standards are different, due to the drive time encountered in rural cases. Although the caseloads are different, the terms are not clearly defined. Many caseworkers working in areas defined as "urban," such as Scottsbluff, also service rural areas and experience significant drive time in managing their caseloads. The workgroup recommends that "rural" and "urban" be defined to be more in line with the caseworker's experiences of the region served.

**Recommendations:**

1. Clarify definitions of "urban" and "rural" for purposes of calculating caseloads.
2. Create a technological solution to the complexity of calculating mixed-caseloads.
3. Increase oversight to ensure that statutory caseload limits are followed, and that the caseload limit is reviewed for appropriateness.
4. Utilize legislative oversight to ensure that compliance with the caseloads is maintained.

## **Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue**

“Vicarious trauma” and “compassion fatigue” are two terms used interchangeably to describe the secondary trauma experienced by caseworkers who witness or hear about the traumatic experiences of the people they serve. The nature of the profession attracts workers who care deeply about families, so daily exposure to traumatic events or stories can have negative effects on caseworkers. Vicarious trauma causes unhappiness and distress in caseworkers, with negative consequences for the worker’s family life and job performance. Fortunately, there are excellent services and trainings available to help caseworkers prevent and lessen the effects of vicarious trauma.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Make counseling services available to case workers experiencing vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue.
2. Ensure caseworkers are aware of resources to help with vicarious trauma and fatigue, and encourage the utilization of these resources.
3. Encourage the continued efforts of the DHHS and pilot project NFC in this area.

## **Training and Work Support**

An effective social worker has a number of skills and competencies outside of knowledge of the child welfare system, child development, and family dynamics. Key components of the job include the ability of the caseworker to manage his or her time and organize his or her workload, while maintaining a work-life balance. A new caseworker may not have these skills upon entering the workforce. An effective training program should include information on these skills.

Stakeholders have also identified a need to provide critical thinking training for caseworkers. The role and judgment of caseworkers is critical for all families, especially court-involved families. Communication between judges and caseworkers is imperative. Judges need to be able to rely on caseworkers to explain the decisions and recommendations put forth in court. Judges are often unaware of the decision-making tools such as SDM and various assessments that result in the caseworker’s recommendations. Caseworkers need to be able to explain the decision making tool utilized, and how the facts of the case were applied to support the recommendation to the Court.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Training programs for new caseworkers should include professional development in areas such as time management and workload management.

2. Develop and utilize a program to ensure effective communication between judges and caseworkers.
3. Develop and utilize a training program that enhances critical thinking skills.
4. Perform a thorough and comprehensive review of caseworker training and curriculum to ensure that it reflects best practices in the field.
5. Encourage and support the continued efforts of the DHHS and NFC in this area.

### **Next Steps**

After forwarding its recommendations to the Legislature, the workgroup will remain available as a resource to the Legislature and the Nebraska Children's Commission for child welfare and juvenile justice workforce related issues. The Workforce Workgroup requests that a comprehensive Interim Study be done by the Legislature to explore the components necessary for a stable, effective and professional child welfare workforce and statutory changes necessary to support the workforce.

Nebraska Children's Commission  
Suggested 2015 Meeting Dates  
Time: 9:00am to 3:00pm  
Place: TBD

Thursday, January 22

Wednesday, February 18

Tuesday, March 17

Tuesday, April 21

Tuesday, May 19

Tuesday, June 16

Tuesday, July 21

Tuesday, August 18

Tuesday, September 15

Tuesday, October 20

Tuesday, November 17

Tuesday, December 15

Nebraska Children's Commission  
 Bills of Focus  
 Nebraska State Legislature  
 104<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 1<sup>st</sup> Session

| Bill #       | Title   | Introduced by | Committee Assignment      | Public Hearing Date            | Legislative Action                                | Governor Action      | Date Effective | Comments            |
|--------------|---|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| <u>LB15</u>  | Provide additional powers and duties for guardians ad litem                           | Krist         | Judiciary                 | 2-26-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1113 | Placed on General File w/AM514                    |                      |                | Krist Priority Bill |
| <u>LB87</u>  | Change membership of the Nebraska Children's Commission                               | Campbell      | Health and Human Services | 1-21-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1510 | Passed on Final Reading President/ Speaker signed | Approved by Governor | 9-5-15         |                     |
| <u>LB199</u> | Provide for stipends for social work students   | Howard        | Health and Human Services | 2-19-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1510 | Placed on General File w/AM513                    |                      |                |                     |
| <u>LB229</u> | Appropriate funds to the Supreme Court for court appointed special advocate state aid | Watermeier    | Appropriations            | 3-10-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1524 |   |                      |                |                     |
| <u>LB243</u> | Create a pilot project relating to family finding services                            | Bolz          | Health and Human Services | 2-19-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1510 |   |                      |                |                     |
| <u>LB265</u> | Change provisions relating to juveniles and child welfare                             | Campbell      | Judiciary                 | 2-27-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1510 |   |                      |                |                     |
| <u>LB292</u> | Change provisions relating to the   | Coash         | Judiciary                 | 2-25-15<br>1:30pm              |   |                      |                |                     |

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 Nebraska State Legislature  
 104<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 1<sup>st</sup> Session

| Bill #       | Title   | Introduced by | Committee Assignment      | Public Hearing Date            | Legislative Action    | Governor Action | Date Effective | Comments                |
|--------------|---|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------------|
|              | central registry of child protection cases  |               |                           | Room 1113                      |                       |                 |                |                         |
| <u>LB294</u> | Adopt the Human Trafficking Victims Civil Remedy Act and change and adopt provisions relating to service of process, sexual assault, crimes relating to morals, human trafficking, search warrants, juveniles, intercepted communications, and forfeiture of assets | Scheer        | Judiciary                 | 3-4-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1113  |                       |                 |                | Scheer<br>Priority Bill |
| <u>LB296</u> | Require the Department of Health and Human Services to provide notification after removal of a child  | Kolterman     | Health and Human Services | 2-19-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1510 | General File w/ AM447 |                 |                |                         |
| <u>LB441</u> | Change provisions relating to the bridge to   | Bolz          | Health and Human Services | 2-19-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room      | General File          |                 |                |                         |

Nebraska Children's Commission  
 Bills of Focus  
 Nebraska State Legislature  
 104<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 1<sup>st</sup> Session

| Bill #       | Title   | Introduced by | Committee Assignment | Public Hearing Date            | Legislative Action | Governor Action | Date Effective | Comments |
|--------------|---|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|
|              | independence program                                      |               |                      | 1510                           |                    |                 |                |          |
| <u>LB485</u> | State intent relating to appropriations for child welfare | Stinner       | Appropriations       | 3-17-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1524 |                    |                 |                |          |
| <u>LB566</u> | Change provisions of the Indian Child Welfare Act         | Coash         | Judiciary            | 2-26-15<br>1:30pm<br>Room 1113 |                    |                 |                |          |

Related juvenile justice bills monitored by the Juvenile Services (OJS) Committee include: LB13, LB25, LB212, and LB500.