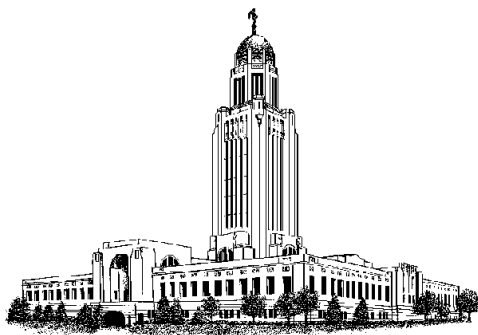


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COMMITTEES

Chairperson - Health and Human Services  
Banking, Commerce and Insurance  
Committee on Committees  
Executive Board  
Reference  
Legislature's Planning

November 17, 2015

Members of the Nebraska Children's Commission:

At the September 15, 2015 meeting of the Nebraska Children's Commission, I requested responses to questions to determine necessary legislative action for the reauthorization of the Commission. Responses are included below in Appendix 1. Some highlights of the responses include:

- Unanimous support for the reauthorization of the Commission.
- The Commission has accomplished its statutory goals.
- Suggested expanding the jurisdiction of the commission into areas of juvenile justice, alternative response, and behavioral health.
- More specific tasks be given to the Commission from the Legislature.
- Clarify whether Commission is advisory, has oversight authority, or should take action on items.
- Avoid duplication with work of other groups.
- Allow the Commission to facilitate research and reports to make recommendations on best practices.

Discussion is welcome on the length of extension and additional tasks for the commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathy Campbell".

Kathy Campbell  
District 25

KC:jdl

## Appendix 1: Responses

Regarding the Nebraska Children's Commission:

### **1. Please evaluate the Commission's progress. Has the Commission successfully addressed the statutory responsibilities and mission statement? How or how not?**

Yes, 'but' is my answer to this. I wanted to be on the Commission to make a difference for kids; to take action to improve outcomes. Knowing what I do now, I do not think the NCC is the best way for me to do that. Our progress feels slow to me. My background is business, not child welfare. I have a heart for it but no expertise. I am task-oriented and efficient by nature and this commission is not those things. In conclusion, I believe we have met our statutory responsibilities. I think there is more we could do by setting SMART goals.

I believe that the NCC has fulfilled most of its original responsibilities specified in LB 821 with the exceptions of the following:

Recommend either the establish of a new division within DHHS or establishing of a new state agency....and

Provide a permanent forum for collaboration among...stakeholders in child welfare programs and services.

In particular, the NCC Committees and workgroup have had significant accomplishments since the creation of the commission with perhaps the most notable accomplishment being the stabilization of Nebraska's foster care system. While it is my belief that Nebraska's child welfare and juvenile system are stabilizing, it also is extremely fragile and easily disrupted. It is for this reason that I would not support the creation of a new child welfare entity or any other major system change at this time. As one state senator recently said to me, we need to focus on making things work rather than moving the work from place to place.

Regarding the NCC's charter of being a permanent forum, I am not sure that this is necessary in the long-term, but it probably would be prudent to re-authorize the NCC for two more years with its current membership to monitor the child welfare and juvenile systems and to prepare a plan for either the continuation of the NCC or the discontinuation of the NCC in 2018.

I think the Commission has done a good job of attending to the statutory responsibilities while being responsive to emerging issues. The combination of work groups created through the Commission's strategic planning process and the committees created by statute have worked well.

The Commission has addressed many of the statutory responsibilities assigned through the original statute LB821 (2012) and subsequent legislation passed in 2013 and 2014 including developing a strategic plan (both Phase I and Phase II); providing oversight and assistance to various legislatively mandated committees including Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support (Bridge to Independence), IV-E Demonstration Committee (Alternative Response Stakeholders Group), Foster Care Reimbursement Rate

Committee, Juvenile Justice Services Committee, and Psychotropic Medication Committee; employing a Policy Analyst, facilitated conferencing through the Community Ownership of Child Well-Being Workgroup, monitoring of the Crossover Youth Program, and the Nebraska Juvenile Service Delivery Project; formal reports addressing DHHS operations and structure, the utilization of Lead Agencies in the delivery of child welfare services, quality evidence-based prevention and early intervention services, child welfare indicators, child welfare financing, Cross System Analysis, and status reports to the Legislature. The Commission needs to do further work with the DHHS Service Areas to strengthen the continuum of services available to child welfare agencies and provide resources for children and juveniles outside the child welfare system, and assist in strategic planning to address the unique needs of each service area.

The Commission has made progress in addressing the statutory responsibilities but it has been a struggle to stay on task. The many changes in leadership positions have slowed progress but that is not meant as a negative because fresh viewpoints are good. The work is slow due to many parties still being somewhat protective of their turf, but cooperation has been growing in addressing the mission statement.

I feel that the State of Nebraska is taking a progressive approach to analyzing the health of the Child Welfare system and infrastructure. The focus on interdepartmental cooperation to identify gaps, research best practices, define success, work on technology tools, and bring a wide array of constituents/stakeholders to the table to provide feedback and direction is incredibly impactful. We cannot facilitate child welfare in a vacuum - we need to objectively view what is working/not working as well as best practices in other states to continue to improve our children's futures in Nebraska.

**2. Should the Legislature re-authorize the Nebraska Children's Commission?  
Please explain.**

Sure. The NCC has fantastic people (and legislators) who care deeply about Nebraska's children and who have the expertise to contribute in important ways. I would be curious to know if the governor is supportive of the commission. Governor Heinemann attended multiple meetings. We have not heard or seen anything from Governor Ricketts. His presence is not necessary but, since the commission is to bring together all three branches of government, I think it's important to determine how he feels about the commission's composition, purpose and achievements prior to re-authorizing. In addition, his office receives and approves the applications so I think that is another reason to see where he stands.

I recommend the re-authorization for two years with no change in the composition of the NCC's current membership. Since most of the NCC's work can be accomplished through its committees and workgroups, I believe the commission should move to a quarterly meeting format that would allow for oversight of the committees/workgroups and monitoring on a high level of child welfare and juvenile services.

Yes, I think it should be reauthorized. The Commission provides a structure to provide oversight to the child welfare system and to advise the Governor and Legislature on what is going well and areas needing improvement and to provide input and recommendations on issues. It also provides a structure to provide feedback and recommendations to key state agencies, i.e. DHHS, Probation, NDE.

Yes. LB821 identified the need and foresaw the benefits of establishing a permanent forum for collaboration among state, local, community, public and private stakeholders and I believe this is a continued need. The Children's Commission has been vital in strengthening and providing stability to the child welfare system in Nebraska. There continues to be the need for a group of broad based stakeholders to review the activities of child welfare and juvenile justice and I believe the Legislature will continue to look to the Children's Commission to provide an in-depth look into issues within both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Juvenile justice reform is facing challenges that the Children's Commission can assist, help address and improve stability of the system as it has done with child welfare.

The work of the commission while it has been slow has been meaningful and thoughtful. If the Commission was re-authorized it could continue the discussion of the responsibilities it was given because further discussion is needed and if not continued with the commission it would take place in another forum and would entail backing up and duplicating the effort that has already been put in.

I believe the Legislature should definitely re-authorize the Nebraska Children's Commission. It is only via clear and objective feedback from all stakeholders that we will clearly understand where we have significant gaps. We cannot afford to jeopardize the future of the children impacted by all facets of our child welfare system in NE by not being open to the expertise and recommendations of those that work in the system every day. We also have to look outside our state to identify best practices that we can implement in efforts to aim for best in class service to our children.

### **3. What responsibilities or tasks should be included in the new legislation to re-authorize?**

Expect the commission to set SMART goals: Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time bound or set them for us. The commission is loaded with people who are important to the child welfare community. It only has one or two of us that are taking a vacation day from work to be there. When I am volunteering an entire day, I want it to be worthwhile. I expect to get stuff done. It is really important to get a lot of information in order to make informed decisions but I feel like we look at so much data and we take so little action. I have heard these same issues (about permanency, for example) for the 10 years that I've been involved in child welfare. We need to think big (strategically) as a commission but it is time to start small; start someplace.

In addition to ongoing monitoring of the child serving systems, I recommend that the NCC should review all of the monitoring and oversight organizations or systems that are currently in place in Nebraska to determine:

How are these bodies/systems functioning?

Is there overlap between these other bodies/systems with each other and/or the NCC?

And given the assessment of this, should any changes be made to any of these bodies including the NCC?

My concern is that the Nebraska system actually has considerable oversight, but I am not sure that our oversight bodies or systems are efficient and/or contributing to a continuous quality improvement and accountability culture that we need to have to create a system of care that really works for children and families.

I think the best role for the Commission to play is in an advisory capacity to the Legislature, the Governor and DHHS. It can provide a forum to explore issues and to develop recommendations for how the child welfare system could be improved. It could also track data on child well-being, highlight successful efforts to improve child well-being, and barriers that impede progress. I do think it is important to be clear on whether the Commission is an advisory body or is expected to take some sort of action. And I think it is important that the Commission not duplicate the efforts of other state level commissions and committees. The current structure where workgroups and subcommittees take a deep dive into issues and bring recommendations to the full Commission works well in my opinion.

Oversight and support of Juvenile Justice reform, continuation of monitoring of Alternative Response, child welfare financing, insure Nebraska moves forward in implementing the system of care strategic plan developing by DHHS Division of Behavioral Health.

The need to meet and discuss the tasks/responsibilities is important and while the members of the commission are all busy with other tasks, it seems that there has been a push to have less meetings. Less meetings if they are more meaningful is a good thing but not meeting and not engaging with the various entities leaves some on the commission out of the loop if we are not part of a day to day entity that deals with these issues as a main part of our jobs. The State agencies and NFC have been discussed, researched and have had reports given to them and at times it seems the reports go in to them but the commission is not given follow up. The Commission has been courteous to all of its members but it seems that there is something that is missing because some of the frustrations of the system that were expressed very early are still there and the commission for whatever reason does not seem to be able to get the discussion of some of these matters going in greater detail. Maybe the items are potentially critical of some of the agencies and due to courtesy the members are a bit fearful to be open but it still seems that the Commission at times struggles. The Commission has tried to cover the initial tasks and has made an effort to give back to the Legislature comments on the items needed but the Senators who have attended and spoken to the Commission at times seemed to have wanted more. If the Legislature wants more input from the Commission,

it may help all involved if more specific tasks were given going forward to assist the Legislature in its work.

Focus on researching other states - we should not recreate the wheel if strong approaches that are outcome based are working elsewhere. We should implement technology and efficiencies wherever possible to drive maximum service levels for the children and their families. We should authorize the commission to facilitate all of the research necessary to bring the best in class recommendations to the State of Nebraska to ensure we all have done our due diligence to improve and drive positive outcomes for the children impacted by the many systems that touch child welfare.