

Nebraska Children's Commission

2016 Strategic Planning Background Information

Mission Statement: To improve the safety and well-being of children and families in Nebraska

Leadership: Beth Baxter (Chair). Gene Klein (Vice-Chair), Karen Authier (Past-Chair)

Statutory Changes for Nebraska Children's Commission

1. **Inclusion of juvenile justice in the statutory charge to the Nebraska Children's Commission.**
 - a. The Nebraska Children's Commission is created as a high-level leadership body to (a) create a statewide strategic plan for reform of ~~the~~ child welfare and juvenile justice system programs and services in the state of Nebraska. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4202(1)(a)]
 - b. The Commission shall provide a permanent forum for collaboration among state, local, community, public, and private stakeholders in child welfare and juvenile justice programs and services. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4202(1)(c)]
2. **Inclusion of juvenile justice system representatives in the Commission's membership.**
 - a. The members appointed pursuant to this subdivision shall represent stakeholders in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems ~~system~~ and shall include [...]. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4202(2)(b)]
 - b. A biological parent currently or previously involved in the child welfare system or juvenile justice system. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4202(2)(b)(vi)]
3. **Additional Statutory Charge**
 - a. Monitor and evaluate the child welfare and juvenile justice system. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4202(1)(c)]
4. **Provision prohibiting private benefit**
 - a. No member of the commission shall have any private financial interest, profit, or benefit from any work of the commission. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4202 (6)]
 - b. No member of any committee created pursuant to this section shall have any private financial interest, profit, or benefit from any work of such committee. [Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4303(c)]

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee (Statutory Committee)

Leadership: Mary Jo Pankoke, Chair

Statutory Information: This Committee was created by LB216 (2013) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §473-4513 to make recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Commission regarding the Bridge to Independence Program, extended guardianship assistance, and extended adoption assistance.

2015 Priority Recommendations and Focus

1. The Committee will continue to focus on monitoring the implementation of B2i in partnership with DHHS, the Foster Care Review Office, and other stakeholders to create recommendations for improvement to the B2i program.
2. Support the Juvenile Justice Extension Task Force's recommendation to expand the B2i program to the juvenile justice population, by allowing the young people under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Office of Probation and 3B wards under the jurisdiction of DHHS who are in out-of-home placement at age 18 to voluntarily enroll in the B2i program.

Relevant Legislative Resolution: [LR 514](#), introduced by Senator Bolz

Purpose: The purpose of this interim study is to examine the availability of transition services for youth who will leave or have left the juvenile justice system while in an out-of-home placement and to determine whether additional transition services are needed.

Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee

Leadership: Peg Harriott and Gene Klein (Co-chairs)

Statutory Information: This Committee was created by LB530 (2013) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4217 to make recommendations on foster care reimbursement rates, statewide standardized level of care assessment, and adoption assistance payments.

2015 Priority Recommendations and Focus

1. There is a need for the issue of group home care to be looked at further through a legislative review, in order to measure the quality of care, cost of care, and performance outcomes. Identifying the acuity of children and youth served is important when considering outcome based performance measures.
2. The FCRRC is focused on creating recommendations on foster care reimbursement rates and the statewide standardized level of care assessment for its report to the legislature in 2016.

2016 Statutory Report Recommendations and Focus

1. **The FCRRC recommends that the current Foster Parent Base Rates continue to be implemented.** These rates are fair, adequately reflect the cost of raising a child in the care of the state, and will ensure retention and requirement of high-quality foster parents and ensure that foster children's best interests are served.
2. **The FCRRC recommends that the current Agency Support Rates should continue to be implemented.** The FCRRC found that the agency support rates are adequate, fair, and no changes are necessary at this time.
3. **The FCRRC and Commission, in partnership with DHHS, Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC), Administrative Office of Probation (AOP), and child placing agencies, should continue to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the base rates, level of parenting rates, and Child Placement Agency Rates.** This will allow the FCRRC to achieve the intent of LB530, and ensure that the rates support the retention and recruitment of high quality foster homes and ensure that foster children's best interests are served.

Additional Assignment: The Nebraska Children's Commission tasked this group with researching and making recommendations related to a rate structure that includes expectations regarding treatment components adequate to serve youth in out-of-home care for whom placement is problematic. This group assigned this task to the Treatment Foster Care Workgroup.

Relevant Legislative Resolution: [LR 551](#), Introduced by Senator Krist

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to explore and assess the use of congregate care in Nebraska for youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The Juvenile Services Committee

Leadership: Nicole Brundo and Kim Hawekotte (Co-chairs)

Past Leadership: Ellen Brokofsky and Martin Klein (Co-chairs)

Statutory Information: Created by LB821(2012) and codified at Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203, this Committee examines the structure and responsibilities of the Office of Juvenile Services and the Administrative Office of Probation, and makes recommendations related to the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC) and the juvenile justice system of care and out-of-home placements.

2015 Priorities and Recommendations of Focus:

1. The Committee has created a Data Analysis and Mapping Taskforce (“Taskforce”) to create recommendations related to the process of moving to a regional system. The Taskforce has representation from the Office of Juvenile Services, Probation, the Foster Care Review Office, and the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska – Omaha. The first meeting of the Taskforce will take place on December 8, 2015, and will report to the full Committee at its January meeting.
2. The Committee will use the information identified by the Data Analysis and Mapping Taskforce to create recommendations regarding a pilot site for a regional facility, to determine the type of youth to be served, the kinds of programs to be offered, and the intake requirements. Potential populations to be served at this pilot site include the population of juvenile justice system involved youth who are receiving treatment out of state, youth who are committed to a YRTC at the age of 18, or another population identified by the Taskforce.
3. As additional legislative bills are introduced to continue or restructure the juvenile justice reform efforts, the Committee will provide feedback and recommendations to the Nebraska Children’s Commission and Judiciary Committee of the Legislature.

2016 Statutory Changes:

1. **Expansion of scope to include review of Juvenile Services Division of the Office of Probation Administration and juvenile justice out-of-home placements.**
 - a. The commission shall create a committee to examine ~~the structure and responsibilities of~~ the Office of Juvenile Services and the Juvenile Services Division of the Office of Probation Administration ~~as they exist on April 12, 2012~~. Such committee shall review the role and effectiveness of out-of-home placements utilized in the juvenile justice system, including the youth rehabilitation and treatment centers, ~~in the juvenile justice system~~ and make recommendations to the commission on ~~the future role of the youth rehabilitation and treatment centers in~~ the juvenile justice continuum of care, including what populations should be served in out of home placements ~~they should serve~~ and what treatment

services should be provided at the centers in order to appropriately serve those populations.

2. Expansion of scope to include juvenile justice continuum of care.

- a. The recommendations ~~If the committee's recommendations include maintaining the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center Kearney, the recommendation shall include a plan to implement a continuum of care in the juvenile justice system to meet the needs of Nebraska families, including specific recommendations for the rehabilitation and treatment model by upgrading the center's physical structure, staff, and staff training and the incorporation of evidence based treatments and programs.~~

3. Annual report requirement

- a. The recommendations shall be delivered to the commission and electronically to the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature annually by December 1, ~~2013~~.

2016 Planning Update

The Juvenile Services Committee met in 2016 to determine a workplan to further the recommendations created in its 2013 Phase I Strategic Plan. The committee created the following workgroups:

1. Courts and Legal Systems Workgroup

- a. This workgroup will create recommendations related to legal and court issues that impact youth in the juvenile justice system.

2. Evaluation of Programs and Assessment of Youth Workgroup

- a. This workgroup will work to examine and make recommendations about the effectiveness of programs available to youth in the juvenile justice system, and the effectiveness and validity of tools used to assess youth in the juvenile justice system. The work of the Data, Technology, and Mapping workgroup has been incorporated into this group.

3. Services Coordination Workgroup

- a. This workgroup will examine the juvenile justice system of care, and make recommendations related to gaps in the continuum of care and wraparound services for youth.

4. Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center and Out-of-Home Placement Workgroup

- a. This workgroup will review and make recommendations related to out-of-home placements in the juvenile justice system. They have started their focus on the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers, and what population should be served there, and what services should be provided.

Relevant Legislative Resolutions: [LR561](#), introduced by Senator Krist.

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to study the effectiveness, economic stability, and long-term viability of the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center-Kearney and Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center-Geneva.

The Normalcy Task Force

Leadership: Sarah Helvey, Katie McLeese Stephenson (Co-Chairs)

Statutory Change in in 2016

1. The Normalcy Taskforce is created. Beginning July 1, 2016, the Normalcy Taskforce shall monitor and make recommendations regarding the implementation in Nebraska of the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183, as such act existed on January 1, 2016.
2. The taskforce shall provide a written report with recommendations regarding the initial and ongoing implementation of the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, as such act existed on January 1, 2016, and related efforts to improve normalcy for children in foster care and related populations to the Nebraska Children's Commission, the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Governor by December 15 of each year. The report to the health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature shall be submitted electronically.

Relevant Legislative Resolution: Legislative Resolution 529 introduced by Howard

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to study the ongoing implementation of the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (strengthening Families Act), Public Law 113-183, and related state law and policy. This study shall assess needs arising from the implementation of the federal Strengthening Families Act and determine next steps for the Strengthening Families Act Task Force of the Nebraska Children's Commission.

Psychotropic Medications Committee

Leadership: Paula Wells, Gregg Wright (Co-Chairs)

Past Leadership: Candy Kennedy-Goergen, Jen Nelson (Past Co-Chairs)

Statutory Charge: The commission shall create a committee to examine state policy regarding the prescription of psychotropic drugs for children who are wards of the state and the administration of such drugs to such children. Such committee shall review the policy and procedures for prescribing and administering such drugs and make recommendations to the commission for changes in such policy and procedures.

2015 Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. Continue to support DHHS's implementation of the Commission's approved framework for the utilization of psychotropic medication for children who are state wards.
2. Continue to partner with Nebraska's universities to support and provide guidance on psychotropic medication research protocols.

Community Ownership of Child Well-being

Leadership: Mary Jo Pankoke (Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Encourage timely access to effective services through community ownership of child well-being.

- Identify, promote and achieve board support for key elements for successful families.
- Map available data for resources, gaps, needs and services.
- Build State level infrastructure for prevention with integration and blended funds
- Strengthen and expand community collaboratives
- Raise visibility and encourage dialogue

2014 Strategic Process Update:

- State level collective impact group
- Identify child well-being outcomes and indicators
- Increase target communities from 6-12
- Translation of data elements to be useful to communities
- Address barriers that were identified by communities
- Continue to work on model
 - Engaging schools, focus on prevention, special populations

2015 Recommendations and Focus

1. Establish a clear understanding of how successful prevention efforts across the state support the Alternative Response Program.
2. Document successful prevention efforts underway in communities across the state.
 - a. The workgroup has provided an inventory of evidence based programs in communities that have implemented Alternative Response (attached to workgroup report).
3. The workgroup is working with the Prevention Partnership to identify existing community collaboration efforts, categorized by community, county, system and outcome.

Data, Technology, Accountability and Reporting

Leadership: Dave Newell (Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Utilize technological solutions to information exchange and ensure measured results across systems of care.

- Create an appropriations schedule utilizing system design
- Explore University expertise for data analysis
- Reach agreement of population outcomes and indicators
- Develop commons data systems and standards with external data mining
- Design data system for integration, coordination, and accessibility

2014 Strategic Plan Update

- Whole population measures vs. issue-specific measures
- Develop frameworks for data dashboard for commission
- Identify technology solutions to produce data for the dashboard

2016 Priority Recommendations and Focus

- 1. Increase the amount of juvenile justice data available to stakeholders and the public:**
 - a. The DTAR workgroup requests an update from the Data Mapping and Analysis Task Force of the Juvenile Services Committee when the Task Force has created a report regarding the data supporting a potential juvenile justice pilot project.
 - b. The Nebraska Children's Commission should request that Probation provide a quarterly update regarding the measures it has identified as areas of focus.
- 2. Support Nebraska's migration from the CFSR Round 2 measures to the CFSR Round 3 measures:**
 - a. The Nebraska Children's Commission should review the seven outcome measures of the CFSR Round 3 on a quarterly basis in order to support the Department of Health and Human Services in migrating to these measures, and provide for a clear and thorough analysis of progress on child welfare indicators.
- 3. Utilize technological solutions to information exchange and ensure measured results across systems of care:**
 - a. The DTAR workgroup requests an update from the Out-of-Home Data Pilot Advisory created by [LB265](#) (2015) when it has made substantial progress on its Out-of-Home Data Pilot Project.

System of Care Workgroup

Leadership: Gene Klein (Chair)

Strategic Plan Goal: Support a family driven, child focused, and flexible system of care through transparent system collaboration with shared partnerships and ownership.

- Develop shared commitment, including trauma informed response.
- Invest in prevention
- Develop differential response system
- Identify model for collaboration and cooperation
- Develop team-based approach for decision making
- Realign operations to support trauma informed system of care
- Develop educated system partners and include oversight

2014 Strategic Plan Update:

- Influence implementation of alternative responses
- Advocate to move SOC strategic plan forward
- Legislation to invest resources in prevention
- Education to action
 - Family centered practice, family driven and youth guided, trauma informed care at all levels of system care

2015 Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. The System of Care Workgroup's priority is to partner with DHHS in its implementation and continued improvement of Alternative Response. The workgroup looks forward to working with DHHS to provide feedback following the Alternative Response evaluation report.
2. An additional priority is to support the implementation of the Division of Behavioral Health's Design for a Nebraska System of Care (SOC) Planning Project.

Statutory Changes in 2016:

The Commission shall develop a system-of-care plan beginning with prevention services through treatment services for the child welfare system based on relevant data and evidence based practices to meet the specific needs of each area of the state. Such system-of-care plan shall include services that are goal-driven and outcome-based and shall evaluate the feasibility of utilizing performance-based contracting for specific child welfare services, including the feasibility of additional contractual requirements for service providers requiring services to all children without an option to deny service. [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203(6)]

Relevant Legislative Resolutions: [LR 544](#), Introduced by Senator Crawford

Purpose: The purpose of this interim study is to examine the alternative response demonstration projects, also known as the alternative response pilot project, created in 2014 by LB 853 and to review the pilot project's implementation by the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The study committee shall also examine the coordination of informal resources available in communities and formal assistance provided through state systems in order to better serve families in the child welfare system

DRAFT

Workforce Workgroup

Leadership: Vacant

Past Leadership: Susan Staab, Past Chair

Strategic Plan Goal: Foster a consistent, stable, skilled workforce serving children and families.

- Benchmark the state with the lowest caseworker turnover
- Develop plan for retention of frontline staff
- Develop retention plan for caseworkers
- Assess and address morale and culture
- Address education and training for staff
- Clearly define point person and roles of all working with children and families
- Conduct comprehensive review of caseworker training and curriculum
- Develop pilot project (urban and rural) for guardians ad litem
- Hire and adequately compensate well-trained professionals

2014 Strategic Plan Update:

- Continue the work of Phase I
- Define and enhance roles of visitation and YRTC workers
- Define and enhance roles of attorneys in juvenile court

Statutory changes were codified in 2016

- a. The commission shall analyze case management workforce issues and make recommendations to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature regarding:
 - i. Salary comparisons with other states and the current pays structure based on job descriptions;
 - ii. Utilization of incentives for persons who work in the area of child welfare;
 - iii. Evidence based training requirements for persons who work in the area of child welfare and the supervisors; and
 - iv. Collaboration with the University of Nebraska to increase and sustain such workforce. [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4203(7)]

2015 Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. The Workforce Workgroup continues to support its two key focus areas to recruit and retain child welfare workers in Nebraska: increased salary and compensation, and the development of career trajectories.
2. Examine ways to increase the number of candidates with Bachelor and Master of Social Work degrees in the child welfare workforce, including:

- a. Continuing to explore financial incentives for attaining a Master of Social Work degree, such as a salary differential for attaining higher education, tuition reimbursement or loan forgiveness programs, and
 - b. Stakeholder partnership with Nebraska's Schools of Social Work to increase capacity in building a child welfare workforce with social work education through long term investment and collaboration.
3. Examine the possibility of requiring all child welfare case managers and supervisors to have degrees from accredited schools of social work, with the understanding that this would require a long term plan of investment in and partnership with Nebraska's universities.

Relevant Legislative Resolution: [LR 513](#) Introduced by Senator Howard

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to examine workforce issues within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Front line professionals within juvenile probation and the Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Children and Family Services have extremely challenging jobs. These professionals do what is necessary to respond to the urgent needs of children, youth, and families every day of the week and at all hours of the day and night. Such tasks include staffing the abuse and neglect hotline, conducting initial assessments, providing ongoing case management, and operating juvenile probation. A skilled and stable workforce of such professionals is key to the successful outcomes for Nebraska's vulnerable children, youth, and families. This can be achieved when staff have manageable caseloads and workloads, when they receive high quality training and education, and when turnover is minimized.

Relevant Legislative Resolution: [LR 580](#) Introduced by Stinner

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to examine the Department of Health and Human Services' policies and procedures for dealing with disallowances and audit exceptions by the federal government which have resulted in large fines and having to return money to the federal government. The study shall include an examination of the following: [...] (6) The department's management analysis of staff as to the quantity and quality of transaction matrices, length of employment, turnover rates for all six divisions, and any other relevant data.

Legal Parties Taskforce

Leadership: Kim Hawekotte, Chair

Issue: The Commission formed this group to examine and make recommendations related to legal parties and the practice of law in the Juvenile Court.

2015 Priority Recommendations and Focus:

1. Continue enhancing the professionalism of the legal parties within juvenile court through the evaluation of the roles and responsibilities of legal parties.
2. Encourage professionalism and attainment of competencies in the practice of juvenile law by:
 - a. Increasing the amount of juvenile practice specific trainings available to legal parties and other system stakeholders,
 - b. Encouraging the Supreme Court of Nebraska to require dedicated Continuing Legal Education (CLE) hours for all legal parties who practice in juvenile court, and
 - c. Researching the legal education in law schools provided to students with interest in pursuing careers in juvenile practice.
3. Research and evaluate the prosecutorial models of Nebraska and other jurisdictions.
4. Research and evaluate solutions to the problems posed by conflicting jurisdiction between the district and juvenile courts, including the feasibility of implementing a unified family court system in Nebraska or codification of the holding of *In Re Stephanie H.*, 10 Neb. App. 908, 639 N.W.2d 668 (2002).
5. Review data regarding the timeliness of adjudication hearings and appeal process in Nebraska, and other states' processes for possible improvement.

Relevant Legislative Resolution: [LR 576](#) Introduced by Senator Pansing-Brooks

Purpose: The purpose of this resolution is to examine children's access to legal counsel in juvenile proceedings across the state of Nebraska.