

## Strengthening Families Act Committee Meeting

January 9, 2020

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Jack J. Huck Continuing Education Center, Room 304

301 South 68<sup>th</sup> Street Place, Lincoln, NE 68510

### 1. Call to Order

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Co-Chairs of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission), Vernon Davis and Sarah Helvey, called the meeting to order at 1:01, and asked those in attendance to introduce themselves.

### 2. Roll Call and Introductions

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#### *Committee Members present (11):*

Deanna Brakhage	Stephanie Gardella	Amara Madsen
Ashley Brown	Ron Giesselmann	Sara Riffel
Heather Colton	Brandy Gustoff	Lisa Story
Vernon Davis	Sarah Helvey	

#### *Committee Members absent (7):*

Payne Ackerman	Patricia Frost	Deb Shuck
Nathan Collier	Kim Hawekotte	
Rebecca Daugherty	Terri Knutson	

#### *Ex Officio Members present (2)*

Kelli Schadwinkel  
Deb VanDyke-Ries

#### *Ex Officio and Resource Members absent (1):*

Bailey Perry

### A quorum was established.

#### *Guests in Attendance (9):*

Crystal Aldmeyer.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Adam Anderson.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
Karen Moran.....	NDHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Felicia Nelson.....	Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
Julie Smith.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division

#### *a. Notice of Publication*

Recorder, Adam Anderson, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings and Nebraska Children's Commission websites in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

#### *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.

### 3. Approval of Agenda

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It was moved by Heather Colton to approve the [agenda](#) as presented. Sara Riffel seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (11):**

Deanna Brakhage  
Ashley Brown  
Heather Colton  
Vernon Davis

Stephanie Gardella  
Ron Giesselmann  
Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey

Amara Madsen  
Sara Riffel  
Lisa Story

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (7):**

Payne Ackerman  
Nathan Collier  
Rebecca Daugherty

Patricia Frost  
Kim Hawekotte  
Terri Knutson

Deb Schuck

**ABSTAINED (0)**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**4. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

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It was moved by Stephanie Gardella and seconded by Heather Colton to approve the minutes of the [October 10, 2019](#) meetings; revising page 2, section 6, subsection (a) to state “this resolution considers potential legislation that would put the Foster Youth Bill of Rights in statute.” There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (11):**

Deanna Brakhage  
Ashley Brown  
Heather Colton  
Vernon Davis

Stephanie Gardella  
Ron Giesselmann  
Brandy Gustoff  
Sarah Helvey

Amara Madsen  
Sara Riffel  
Lisa Story

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (7):**

Payne Ackerman  
Nathan Collier  
Rebecca Daugherty

Patricia Frost  
Kim Hawekotte  
Terri Knutson

Deb Schuck

**ABSTAINED (0)**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**5. Co-Chair Report**

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*a. Nebraska Children’s Commission Update*

Co-chair Helvey shared the recent news that the Nebraska Children’s Commission has hired a new Policy Analyst, Laura Opfer. Former Policy Analyst Chris Jones has moved to a position at the Nebraska Children’s Home Society. Helvey added that Laura Opfer has background in HHS but comes to the Commission directly from the Child Advocacy Center. She has a great background in child welfare. Commission Staff Anderson shared that the next meeting of the Children’s Commission will be held on February 18, 2020 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Helvey thanked Anderson for his work in the interim prior to the new Policy Analyst coming onboard at the Children’s Commission.

Co-Chair Helvey announced to the Children’s Commission and Commission staff that she is resigning her position as Co-chair of the Committee. She added that she has been Co-Chair with Davis since the inception of the SFA Committee,

and offered that there is a good opportunity for someone else to step up into the role of Co-Chair. Additionally, Helvey noted that she has taken on a leadership role on the Supreme Court Commission on Children, Co-Chairing a Committee that will be quite busy within the next year. Lastly, Helvey offered thanks to Co-Chair Davis, as he has been the funnest Co-Chair, and has brought great perspective to the SFA Committee. She encouraged Committee Members to reach out to Commission Staff or herself.

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## 6. Legislative Update

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Co-Chair Helvey directed the Committee's attention to the [handout](#) regarding legislation that would create the the Nebraska Youth in Care Bill of Rights, a bill that will be introduced by Senator Hunt. This bill took input from many youth. Historically, the SFA Committee originally had a subcommittee working on this recommendation. At the last meeting Dave Gottschalk, from Senator Hunt's office shared information about the focus groups involved as part of the interim study. Helvey directed the Committee's attention to the [handout summary](#) from the focus groups that was shared by the Senator's office. This most recent input from youth was incorporated into this newest Bill of Rights.

Helvey shared that the Legislature has ten days of bill introduction that recently started. Applesseed is monitoring bills that are being introduced. Currently, the Nebraska Youth in Care Bill of Rights is the main bill that is most relevant to the SFA Committee. Helvey reminded the Committee that [LB 219](#), Senator Wishart's bill on driver's licenses is on General File. It has not received a priority designation and does not have a bill that it can attach onto because the amended version obtained a fiscal note from DHHS regarding birth certificate cost. Helvey shared that Applesseed is continuing to look at this bill to find a bill that is germane to the driver's license or child welfare, in order to connect this bill onto.

Commission Staff Anderson added that in the interim, prior to the arrival of Laura Opfer, Chris Jones is maintaining a [Bill Tracker](#) on the Nebraska Children's Commission website. Helvey added that Applesseed also tracks legislation on their [website](#).

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## 7. Driver's License Policy Follow-up Discussion

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Co-Chair Helvey shared a [handout](#) that shows a policy update by the Department of Motor Vehicles. Helvey clarified from a meeting with DMV, youth under 21 who are in foster care may show proof of residence using address verification of their placement (foster parents or group home) with a court order showing such placement or a letter from DHHS verifying their status as a state ward and indicating their placement. Member Brakhage noted that DHHS hadn't received any requests for a letter from DHHS, however foster youth may be receiving the letter directly from DHHS Caseworkers. Members discussed the issue of the certified copy of the birth certificate as required by the regulations. Member Riffel proposed a potential workaround for the requirements, where a youth in foster care would have a way to work with the documents available to them, perhaps electronically, that would be good enough to cover all three DMV requirements. Sara Riffel and Vernon Davis will look into this workaround. Members discussed an opportunity for youth to have digital copies of their documents. Riffel noted that Connected Youth Initiative is really exploring the idea of a Virtual Locker, where the youth would have all their documents accessible to them.

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## 8. SFA Judicial Findings

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Co-Chair Helvey shifted the Committee's attention to an excerpt from the [Foster Care Review Office 2019 Annual Report](#) noting that only 1/3 of court orders contained the required SFA findings. Member VanDyke-Ries, from the Court Improvement Project noted that they have begun to draft up example language for the courts. Mary Ann Harvey, from CIP will be meeting with Neleigh Boyer from DHHS to make sure everything is in alignment. She added that once the language for the court orders is solidified the CIP will be determining the next best steps to make sure that language can be included in the court orders.

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## 9. Normalcy Subcommittee

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Subcommittee Co-Chair Felicia Nelsen updated that Committee that the Normalcy Subcommittee has not met since the last SFA Committee meeting. The Normalcy Subcommittee will be reviewing the next round of Normalcy Plans from the providers in April.

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## **10. APPLA Subcommittee**

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APPLA Subcommittee Chair Crystal Aldmeyer updated the Committee on the recent work of the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee hasn't met within the last few months, but after the last Children's Commission meeting she noted there is some movement, as the Commission is interested in having APPLA jumpstart on some priorities. Aldmeyer shared that there is a meeting to be scheduled at the end of January or beginning of February. Commission Staff Anderson shared that once Laura Opfer joins the Children's Commission as Policy Analyst, she will work with the Commission's Executive Committee and former Policy Analyst Jones to determine which programs or policies the APPLA Subcommittee will be looking into. Co-Chair Helvey expressed that it might be a good idea for the Subcommittee to share with the Commission or the Executive Committee some of the things that it has worked on in the past, to provide some education to some of the new members of the Children's Commission.

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## **11. Trafficking Data**

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Co-Chair Davis reviewed the recently received handouts regarding [Trafficking Policy from DHHS](#) and [corresponding data](#). Davis noted that there was a dramatic increase of cases where trafficking was identified as a maltreatment type in 2019. Helvey noted that a DHHS representative was unable to attend this meeting to answer any questions. Davis added that if any member had any questions to email Adam Anderson or Davis.

Helvey continued by refreshing the Committee's memory regarding the role of the Trafficking Subcommittee and the discussion from the previous meeting.

Sara Riffel added that the Trafficking Subcommittee may be able to look at some of the services for survivors of trafficking. Helvey agreed that with the legal change it would be good to look at meeting again to look

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## **12. Public Comment**

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Co-Chairs Davis and Helvey invited any public forward who wished to make comment. No comment was offered.

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## **10. Next Steps**

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Co-Chair Helvey noted that she will follow-up this meeting with an email with the DMV contact regarding driver's licenses for foster youth.

Co-Chair Davis asked for preferences on the next meeting. It was agreed that the next meeting will be on May 14, 2020, from 1:00-3:00 p.m.

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## **11. Adjournment**

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The meeting adjourned at 1:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Adam Anderson