

## Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee

April 1, 2021

1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Webex Online Video Conferencing System

### I. Call to Order and Welcome

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Co-Chair, Christina Lloyd, called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 1:02 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Lloyd asked Adam Anderson to call roll.

### II. Roll Call and Introductions

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#### *Committee Members present (13):*

Becky Bounds	Camas Holder	Sara Riffel
Vernon Davis	Jill Holt	Susan Thomas
Mary Fraser Meints	Christina Lloyd	Lana Verbrigghe (1:11 p.m.)
Taylor Givens-Dunn	Felipe Longoria	
<i>Proxy for Sarah Helvey</i> , Allison Derr	Bailey Perry	

#### *Committee members absent (1):*

Whitney Beck

#### *Ex-Officio Members present (5):*

Brandy Gustoff  
Maghan Madsen  
Katie McLeese Stephenson  
Jennifer Skala  
Deb VanDyke-Ries

#### *Ex-Officio Members absent (3):*

Candi Marcantel  
Sara Quiroz  
Senator Anna Wishart

**A quorum was established.**

#### *Guests in Attendance (10):*

Adam Anderson.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
Deanna Brakhage.....	Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Linda Cox.....	Foster Care Review Office
Jason Feldhaus.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Mandi Juricek.....	Court Improvement Project
Felipe Longoria.....	Central Plains Center for Services
Angie Ludemann.....	Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Laura Opfer.....	Nebraska Children's Commission

#### *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 Meeting and Nebraska Children's Commission website 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 on the Nebraska Children's Commission website.

### III. Approval of Agenda

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It was moved by Mary Fraser Meints and seconded by Susan Thomas to approve the [agenda](#) as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (12)**

Vernon Davis  
Mary Fraser Meints  
Taylor Givens-Dunn  
*Proxy for Sarah Helvey, Allison Derr*

Camas Holder  
Jill Holt  
Christina Lloyd  
Felipe Longoria

Bailey Perry  
Sara Riffel  
Susan Thomas  
Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

Becky Bounds

**ABSENT (1):**

Whitney Beck

**MOTION CARRIED**

**IV. Approval of Minutes**

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It was moved by Lana Verbrigghe to approve the [January 14, 2021 minutes](#) as presented. The motion was seconded by Mary Fraser Meints. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (13)**

Becky Bounds  
Vernon Davis  
Mary Fraser Meints  
Taylor Givens-Dunn  
*Proxy for Sarah Helvey, Allison Derr*

Camas Holder  
Jill Holt  
Christina Lloyd  
Felipe Longoria  
Bailey Perry

Sara Riffel  
Susan Thomas  
Lana Verbrigghe

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (1):**

Whitney Beck

**MOTION CARRIED**

**V. Co-Chair Report**

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Co-chair Lloyd noted not much new to report on. She shared that in February a small group of members met virtually with DHHS to discuss the funds coming from the COVID-19 stimulus package. Lloyd noted that report out on this from DHHS will follow later in the agenda.

**VI. Legislative Update**

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Laura Opfer updated the Committee regarding the probation extension of B2i eligibility in Senator Pansing Brooks' LB 202. Opfer shared that she was on a call with the Office of Senator Pansing Brooks, and their office was hopeful to move this bill out of committee soon. Senator Vargas' LB262 has not been voted out of committee and may not make it to the floor. Opfer noted that this is the first year of a two-year session, so bills can carryover to the next year.

**VII. Evaluation and Data Collection Workgroup Update**

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Laura Opfer updated the Committee regarding the work of the workgroup. The workgroup met with Deanna Brakhage from DHHS to find ways to evaluate the program on an ongoing basis. Opfer noted that when Katie Bass left the FCRO,

this group has been on pause, but Laura wanted to keep the ongoing evaluation of the B2i program on the minds of the Committee. Opfer shared that Heather Wood joined the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) about a month ago. Laura will meet with Wood after she has become more comfortable with her position at the FCRO and extend the invite to the next meeting.

Laura answered questions regarding the chair position of the workgroup and the desire for the committee to continue receiving data from DHHS.

### **VIII. Case Management Workgroup**

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Chair Sara Riffel reminded the Committee that this group has gone inactive since the last meeting and will come out of inactive status if needed.

### **IX. Finance & Policy Workgroup Update**

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Chair Jason Feldhaus updated the committee regarding the work of the workgroup. He discussed a recent meeting in February of 2021. The workgroup discussed stipends and working with the tribes. He noted that the workgroup decided it wasn't in a place to recommend changes to the stipend at this time but posed a couple questions. Feldhaus asked what is the intent of the committee as to what the stipend should be used for? He specified whether the committee thinks the stipend should be used for housing, additional income, etc. Feldhaus noted that workgroup would like further input for direction.

Feldhaus shared some of the challenges with the tribal transfers for youth back to the state or county. The workgroup believes this transfer to be a barrier for tribal youth joining B2i. The workgroup recommends moving some of the alerts for youth ahead one year for those that are aging out sooner in some circumstances. He continued that legislation may have to be introduced to allow tribes to manage.

Sara Riffel shared in the chat, "According to the GOALS analysis (GOALS is the support for youth that left B2i during the pandemic and continued the monthly stipend for 6 months), GOALS participants were significantly more likely to have monetary savings. While we don't know that the stipend caused that improved outcome, we know that those youth receiving the stipend when all other supports were the same (e.g., coaching/case management), youth with the stipend significantly differed from those that had no stipend." Riffel answered questions regarding the cohort group of youth that did not receive a stipend and whether youth had access to healthcare. Mary Fraser Meints noted that the Committee would need to look at outcomes to determine. Riffel shared that she can look at Connected Youth Initiative data.

Laura Opfer added that a previous discussion involved looking at the cost of living in different areas. Sara Riffel cautioned that regions with lower cost of living may lack other resources. Mary Fraser Meints noted that she has always thought of the stipend as additional income, as youth are required to be in school or working and restricting the stipend's use makes it harder for more people to utilize it. Felipe Longoria agreed and noted that if the stipend covers all expenses there is less incentive and more of a fiscal cliff upon exiting. Riffel added that the Committee should look at all outcomes and not focus all effort on stipend amount.

Deanna Brakhage shared some success stories, and that youth exiting B2i with the help of Opportunity Passport have bought a house. Terrence Williams shared that youth have appreciated the stipend and have shared they feel that the stipend has allowed them to achieve some goals that they didn't not feel possible before. Camas Holder noted that Deputy Director Alger Studsill will be conducting "Fireside Chats" with youth in the B2i program. Felipe Longoria shared that he has heard that youth feel the amount is sufficient.

It was agreed to pause the efforts to look further into the stipend amount. Laura Opfer suggested the workgroup gather data in support of keeping the stipend the same and looking at data to keep options open for further discussion in the future.

It was agreed to continue looking at the tribal transfer issues

The workgroup will schedule a meeting to look at legislative language for tribal transfers.

### **X. Tribal Court Transfers**

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Camas Holder updated the Committee regarding Tribal Court Transfers. She noted that Deanna Brakhage is working with DHHS legal regarding the details of transfers. Brakhage shared that DHHS has met with the Tribes regarding needs of verifying eligibility. A process has been discussed since that time. She noted that she will be staffing all 17.5-year-olds soon. She will have an update at the next B2i meeting regarding that staffing. Deb VanDyke-Ries added that there are discussions

regarding the court transfers from Tribal Court to State Court. Brakhage noted that there is a meeting to discuss the transfers coming up soon.

#### **XI. DHHS Update**

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Camas Holder shared caseload sizes for the B2i program. She noted in Lincoln and rural area caseloads range from 13-23. In Omaha caseloads are 14-26.

Regarding the COVID-19 funds, she shared DHHS is waiting on word from the Governor regarding funding usage. Holder noted that COVID-19 funds need to be used by September 30, 2021 if they are being used more flexibly. If used for sustainability they can be used until September 30, 2022. Holder noted that funds can be used to aid in youth remaining in B2i until age 22.

#### **XII. Public Comment**

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The Co-Chairs welcomed public comment. There was no public comment.

#### **XIII. New Business**

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Adam Anderson shared that the Committee has openings in the Tribal representative and a young adult currently or previously in foster care. Mary Fraser Meints noted that the Children's Commission should look at paying a stipend to youth attending B2i Committee meetings. Sara Riffel noted that Connected Youth Initiative participants are allowed stipends through the Children and Families Foundation. Deb VanDyke-Ries noted that the Children's Commission should look at this issue.

#### **XIV. Upcoming Meeting Planning**

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July 1, 2021; and September 30, 2021. Locations to be determined at a later date.

#### **XV. Adjourn**

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The meeting adjourned at 2:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Adam Anderson