

Nebraska Children’s Commission Meeting

January 11, 2022
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Zoom

And

Nebraska State Office Building
Lower Level Conference Room C
315 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68508

1. Call to Order

Chair Jeanne Brandner welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. She asked Adam Anderson to call roll.

2. Introductions and Roll Call

Commission Members Present (14)

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Jarren Breeling | Ron Giesselmann | Melissa Nance |
| A’Jamal Byndon | Richard Hasty | Felicia Nelsen |
| Vernon Davis | Jessica Hilderbrand | Lana Temple-Plotz |
| Kathy Dinkel | Sara Hoyle | Susan Thomas |
| Misty Flowers | Terri Knutson | |

Commission Members Absent (1)

Rachel Folds

Commission Ex-Officio Members Present (7)

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Stephanie Beasley | Sheri Dawson | Deb VanDyke-Ries |
| Jeanne Brandner | Monika Gross | |
| Jennifer Carter | Judge Roger Heideman | |

Commission Ex-Officio Members Absent (4)

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Michele Borg | Senator Myron Dorn |
| Senator Jen Day | Senator Patty Pansing Brooks |

Roll call was taken through introductions, and a quorum was established.

Guests in Attendance (4)

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Adam Anderson..... | Nebraska Children’s Commission |
| Theresa Cusic..... | Court Improvement Project |
| Laura Opfer..... | Nebraska Children’s Commission |
| Barb Dorn..... | Office of Senator Myron Dorn |
| Ivy Svoboda..... | Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers |

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 Meetings Calendar and Nebraska Children’s Commission websites 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 at the sign-in table and on the Children’s Commission Website.

3. Orientation and History of the Nebraska Children's Commission

Chair Brandner welcomed new members and noted that previous members will have their terms extended until the Governor reappoints or replaces them. She reminded the Commission regarding the reason for meeting virtually, due to rising COVID-19 cases in the community. Chair Brandner asked members to introduce themselves, note their role on the Commission, and provide an interesting fact.

Chair Brandner shared that she is currently the Deputy Administrator of Juvenile Services for the Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation and the Current Chair of the Children's Commission. She shared that she is excited to see many new faces and hopefully some energy and excitement for someone willing to take on the role of Chair of the Commission, as she is looking to relinquish the Chair position. Brandner shared that she is involved in other committees and workgroups, such as the Governor's Commission, the Supreme Court Commission, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) Stakeholder Workgroup, former Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee Chair. Brandner has children that are 10, 17, 30-years-old and three grandchildren.

Jarren Breeling shared that she is Stakeholder on the Children's Commission and is a member of the Alternative Response Committee. She shared that she participates in monthly talks with the Transformation of Child Welfare Committee. She continued that through the monthly talks the Committee has been lifting up lived experience. Breeling shared that she was able to work from home and take care of kids and have them continue school and activities.

A'Jamal Byndon shared that he has been on the commission for 2-3 years. He noted that he is Douglas County's Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Coordinator. Through his work as the RED Coordinator he pushes for acknowledgement of a disproportionate number of youth of color in the juvenile justice system and action on how to rectify that problem. He shared that his funding comes from the federal government. Byndon noted that he serves on the Juvenile Services Committee of the Children's Commission. Byndon was born in Hastings, and he is from a family of 14 children and served two years in the Peace Corps.

Vernon Davis shared that he has been on the Children's Commission since 2017. He noted that he serves on a number of other state commissions, so he is stepping away from his role on the Children's Commission as much as possible. Davis shared that was a member of the B2i Advisory Committee and the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee of the Children's Commission. Davis shared that he loves ice cream.

Misty Flowers shared that she is the Executive Director of the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition and a tribal member in the Santee Sioux Nation in Northeast Nebraska. Flower shared that she is a member of the Commission as a tribal representative. She noted that she is a returning member of 4 or 5 years, is the Co-Chair of the SFA Committee, and was involved in the B2i Committee. Flowers shared that she is on the Supreme Court Commission. Flowers noted that although she is a member of Santee Sioux Nation, she also has Tlinkit, Yankton, Winnebago, and Ponca heritage, but she can only be enrolled in one tribe. Flowers welcomed new members.

Ron Giesselmann shared that he is the Director of the Masonic Eastern Star Home for Children and he is a returning member. He noted that he is on the on Trafficking and Normalcy Subcommittees of the SFA Committee, and also a member of the SFA Committee. Giesselmann shared that he loves to travel with his wife to unique and out of the way bar and grills and have burgers.

Richard Hasty shared that he is the Superintendent and Special Education Director for Plattsmouth Community Schools, and he is in his third year on the Commission. He noted that he may be the first educator on the Commission, or at least the first in recent years. He continued, noting that he currently serves on the Executive Committee of the Commission. Hasty shared that he has always been in special education and has a 15-year tenure as superintendent in Plattsmouth, which is very unique.

Jessica Hilderbrand shared that she is a Stakeholder member of the Commission and has been involved for three years. She noted that she was recently the SFA Co-Chair, but unable to continue in that role this year. She noted that she was also born in Hastings.

Sara Hoyle shared that she is the Director of Human Services in Lancaster County. She noted that as a new member she is not currently involved in any other committees. She noted as a fun fact that she was presenting to County Board.

Terri Knutson share that she has been a member for four years and is a member in the SFA Committee. As a fun fact, she noted that she has been with Saint Francis Ministries since the beginning of case management transition, and she will be transferring to DHHS sometime soon. Knutson shared that her role on the Commission is as a mother who was involved in court system and child welfare system.

Melissa Nance shared that she is the Vice President of Service Delivery at CEDARS Youth Services and sits on the Commission as Stakeholder and new member. She noted that she is not currently involved in other committees or groups. As a fun fact, Nance shared that she won a hula hoop contest in college.

Felicia Nelsen shared that she is the Executive Director of the Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. She noted that she has been on the Commission for several years and sits on several subcommittees and third-tier workgroups of the Commission. She shared, as a fun fact that she recently celebrated her daughter's 21st birthday in Vegas while also trying to maintain COVID protocols, so it was exciting, but also stressful at the same time.

Lana Temple-Plotz shared that she is the CEO of Nebraska Children's Home Society and is returning member of the Commission, with three years on the Commission. She noted that she has been on the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee (FCRRC) for 10 years and sits on the Commission as a Stakeholder. As a fun fact, she shared that she has a puppy named Frankie that she adopted during COVID.

Susan Thomas shared that she is a representative of Nebraska Court Appointed Special Advocates and she has been a member for five years. She noted that she is on the B2i Committee and the Co-Chair of Alternative Response (AR) Committee. She shared that she is sitting in her office on the farm, isolated from COVID, which is great.

Stephanie Beasley shared that she is the Division Director of Children and Family Services for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and she is an Ex-Officio member of the Commission. She shared that she is a Nebraska resident for almost two years, is on a number of other committees, and as a fun fact, she noted that she is a Beekeeper. Beasley said that she thinks her beekeeping is a de-stressor.

Jennifer Carter noted that she is an Ex-Officio member of the Commission as the Inspector General for Nebraska Child Welfare. She noted that her position sits on other committees and commissions, such as the Supreme Court Commission and the Governor's Commission, the Child Death Review Team and some associated subcommittees. She shared that she is originally from Queens, New York and met a farm boy in law school, and has been here for over 18 years, but there's always a part of herself that will be a New Yorker.

Sherri Dawson shared that she is an Ex-Officio member of the Commission as the Director of Behavioral Health for Nebraska DHHS. She shared as a fun fact that she survived the 10th annual Dawson family baking extravaganza that she does with her nieces and nephews each year, noting that it is very messy but also very therapeutic.

Monika Gross shared that she is the Executive Director of Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) and has been involved with many subcommittees of the Commission since its inception. She noted that she is on the Supreme Court Commission and its Education Subcommittee, the Juvenile Justice Coalition, the Multi Disciplinary Team Subcommittee of the Governor's Commission, and the Transformation Steering Committee and Probation Review

Team. Gross shared that she was born in Skylar and grew up on farm with Czech and German heritage. She noted that there were three languages spoken in her house growing up.

Judge Heideman shared that he has been a Judge for 16 years. He noted that he is returning member appointed by the Administrative Office of the Courts. Judge Heideman shared that he is the Co-Chair of the Supreme Court Commission on Children and the Courts and the Statewide Co-Chair of the Supreme Court Through the Eyes of a Child Initiative. A fun fact he shared is that her has five grandchildren, with a sixth on its way in April.

Deb VanDyke Ries share that she is the Director of the Nebraska Court Improvement Project and has been appointed by Supreme Court Administrator as an Ex-Officio Member for six years. VanDyke-Ries noted that she is actively engaged in the B2i and SFA Committees, is the Co-Chair of JSC with Nick Juliano, is a member of Normalcy Subcommittee, and has a wide variety of experience with the Commission. As a fun fact, she shared that she is completing training to become a certified yoga teacher.

Administrative Programs Officer, Adam Anderson introduced himself and shared about his role at the Commission.

Laura Opfer, Policy Analyst with the Children’s Commission introduced herself and shared about her role at the Commission.

Chair Brandner reviewed the Commission Fact Sheet and she shared historical key points of the Commission and its committees. She thanked former Senator Campbell for the work getting the Commission set up. She highlighted some of the work of the committees.

Laura Opfer highlighted some of the work of the committees, from a PowerPoint handout.

A’Jamal Byndon shared thoughts regarding how to engage stakeholders and groups in greater Nebraska.

Opfer continued by sharing the structure and workflow of the Commission.

Vice Chair, Lana Temple-Plotz shared key highlights from the Commission Orientation Manual. She noted that there are a number of leadership openings on the Committees and reminded the members that Chair Brandner plans to relinquish her Chair position on the Commission.

Monika Gross, Executive Director of the FCRO shared how the Children’s Commission staff and program are situated as a program under the FCRO.

Adam Anderson shared highlights from the Nebraska Open Meetings Act and Laura Opfer shared information regarding the voting process.

4. Approval of the Agenda

It was moved by Misty Flowers and seconded by Richard Hasty to approve the agenda as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (14):

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Jarren Breeling | Ron Giesselmann | Melissa Nance |
| A’Jamal Byndon | Richard Hasty | Felicia Nelsen |
| Vernon Davis | Jessica Hilderbrand | Lana Temple-Plotz |
| Kathy Dinkel | Sara Hoyle | Susan Thomas |
| Misty Flowers | Terri Knutson | |

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (0):

ABSENT (7):

Rachel Folds

MOTION CARRIED

Note that the order of items in the minutes will be reflective of the original agenda

5. Approval of the Consent Agenda

- a. [August 17, 2021 Meeting Minutes](#)
- b. [Member Nomination Report](#)

It was moved by Lana Temple-Plotz and seconded by A'Jamal Byndon to approve the consent agenda with corrections to the Member Nomination Report to change add Lindsay Meyer to the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee nominations. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (14):

Jarren Breeling
A'Jamal Byndon
Vernon Davis
Kathy Dinkel
Misty Flowers

Ron Giesselmann
Richard Hasty
Jessica Hilderbrand
Sara Hoyle
Terri Knutson

Melissa Nance
Felicia Nelsen
Lana Temple-Plotz
Susan Thomas

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (0):

ABSENT (7):

Rachel Folds

MOTION CARRIED

6. Committee Structures and Co-Chair Updates

Laura Opfer shared information regarding the recent work of the Committees.

a. Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee (FCRRC)

Felicia Nelsen shared information regarding the FCRRC. She noted that members serve 4-year terms and make recommendations for foster care payments to the legislature. She shared that over the last two years the committee has been making recommendations to the legislature. She highlighted that the workgroups of the FCRRC are exploring recommendations about the Nebraska Caregivers Responsibility (NCR) tool and rate at which agencies are reimbursed for the cost of providing support to foster care providers. She noted that the FCRRC is currently looking at DHHS's recommended tiered levels of the NCR. Laura added information regarding the NCR and the different tiers as well as information regarding the Treatment Family Care recommendation that has been made to the legislature.

b. Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee (B2i)

Laura Opfer shared information regarding the history and work of the B2i Committee, noting that the committee is exploring the financial cliff effect of youth exiting the B2i program as well as continuing to explore data tracking recommendations made in the Child Trends Report that evaluated the B2i program.

c. Juvenile Services Committee (JSC)

Opfer shared information regarding the history and recent work of the JSC, noting that the committee continues to look at the YRTCs, RED, and a needs assessment. Co-Chair of the JSC, Deb VanDyke-Ries added that the JSC holds joint meetings with the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice, and those two groups have members that are looking at similar priorities and often members from both groups join workgroups of the JSC. VanDyke-Ries also shared that there is strong work happening related to Title II funds and having Nebraska return as a participating state with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. She continued that this program would allow counties to draw down federal funds.

d. Strengthening Families Act Committee (SFA)

Opfer shared the history of the SFA committee and its subcommittees. Co-Chair Misty Flowers added that the SFA is also looking to address racial and ethnic disparities as a priority. She noted that the committee recently completed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to make sure the committee is addressing key issues. She continued by noting that the SFA is currently ramping up efforts and developing a strategic plan.

e. Alternative Response Advisory Committee (AR)

Opfer noted that the AR committee is a new committee of the Children’s Commission as of the end of 2020. She shared a brief overview of the AR program and what the committee is tasked at examining. Co-Chair Susan Thomas shared that the committee was surveyed and the results revealed that the committee members hope to explore mental health needs, resources available, oversight of the AR and non-court cases, the process to move from AR to a court-involve case, educating families on services that are available to them, and the legalities surrounding parental rights when a child is placed out of school. Co-Chair Monika Gross shared an overview of member representation and asked for Commission members to share that the AR committee is searching for family caregivers and families with experience in the child welfare system.

7. Strategic Priorities and Multicultural Guidelines

Vice Chair, Lana Temple-Plotz shared information regarding the strategic priorities identified by the Commission in 2019. She continued by noting that digging into the details of the strategic priorities often is addressed at the committee level. She noted that the Commission will be taking a deeper dive at these priorities at the next meeting. Temple-Plotz also noted that the Multicultural Guidelines discussion will be moved to the next meeting.

8. DHHS Update

Children and Family Services Director, Stephanie Beasley shared information regarding the transition of case management from Saint Francis Ministries to DHHS that began recently. She noted the fantastic work that they have done with the transition and the offer of workers to onboard with DHHS. She noted 85-90% of direct care staff will be transferring to DHHS. She added that Saint Francis will maintain their child placing agency contract. Beasley pointed out that each case will be reviewed on transition. She thanked attorneys, CASA, judges, etc. and noted that the transitions will start in the next couple weeks. She noted that it is a 6-month transition.

In response to a question from a member, Director Beasley noted that moving forward the state is not intending to bid again for private case management and that DHHS is prepared to take back case management in the Eastern Service Area. Vice Chair Temple-Plotz also noted the concerns with this transition from Saint Francis also involve the bidding process of the Department of Administrative Services, and she thanked DHHS for the way they are handling the transition. Director Beasley welcomed the opportunity to have open and honest conversations regarding child welfare.

Beasley noted an upcoming town hall in February. She added, this meeting will occur after some of the first case transfers. She offered to share with the Commission or a smaller subgroup about how many case transfers have happened. A’Jamal encouraged DHHS that success is revealed in the data. Members noted in the chat the desire for updates regarding the transfers.

Beasley continued by sharing updates regarding the tiered foster care reimbursement rates. She thanked the FCRRRC for their work and noted a draft of their recommendation will be coming to the workgroups of the FCRRRC soon.

Lastly, Beasley noted that the federal partners have released Nebraska from their improvement plan, by meeting all criteria for improvement, which is good news. She thanked the Deb VanDyke-Ries and partners for their commitment to improving the outcomes.

9. Legislative Update

Laura Opfer shared information regarding legislation that has been introduced, the bill tracker, and membership openings. She shared specific legislative information regarding tiered rates, treatment family care, B2i eligibility, rate increases, and other bills being tracked by the Commission. Opfer noted that she will be updating the tracker as the session continues and she noted its location on the [Children’s Commission Website](#). A’Jamal Byndon encouraged members to make their voice known to the legislature as private citizens.

10. Public Comment

Chair Brandner opened the floor for public comment. There was none.

11. New Business

Laura Opfer noted that members have received a copy of the Governance Memo and it is important to review it in advance of the next meeting, as the members will be reviewing, discussing changes and updates.

12. Upcoming Meeting Planning

April 19, 2022
August 23, 2022
November 1, 2022

13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Anderson