

## Nebraska Children's Commission Meeting

April 19, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Lancaster Extension Education Center

444 Cherrycreek Road

Lincoln, NE 68528

### 1. Call to Order

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Chair Jeanne Brandner welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She asked Adam Anderson to call roll and attendees to introduce themselves.

### 2. Introductions and Roll Call

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#### *Commission Members Present (10)*

Kathy Dinkel	Richard Hasty	Felicia Nelsen
Misty Flowers	Sara Hoyle	Susan Thomas
Rachael Folds	Terri Knutson	
Ron Giesselmann	Melissa Nance	

#### *Commission Members Absent (5)*

Jarren Breeling	Vernon Davis	Lana Temple-Plotz
A'Jamal Byndon	Jessica Hilderbrand	

#### *Commission Ex-Officio Members Present (6)*

Stephanie Beasley	<i>Proxy for Senator Jen Day, Sam Huppert</i>	LaDonna Jones-Dunlap
Jeanne Brandner		
Jennifer Carter	Monica Gross	

#### *Commission Ex-Officio Members Absent (5)*

Sheri Dawson	Judge Roger Heideman	Deb VanDyke-Ries
Senator Myron Dorn	Senator Patty Pansing Brooks	

**Roll call was taken and a quorum was established.**

#### *Guests in Attendance (4)*

Adam Anderson.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
Laura Opfer.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
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. Approval of the Agenda

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It was moved by Felicia Nelsen and seconded by Susan Thomas to approve the agenda as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

Kathy Dinkel	Richard Hasty	Felicia Nelsen
Misty Flowers	Sara Hoyle	Susan Thomas
Rachael Folds	Terri Knutson	
Ron Giesselmann	Melissa Nance	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAIN (0):**

**ABSENT (5):**

Jarren Breeling	Vernon Davis	Lana Temple-Plotz
A'Jamal Byndon	Jessica Hilderbrand	

**MOTION CARRIED**

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

**4. Approval of the Consent Agenda**

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- a. [January 11, 2022 Meeting Minutes](#)
- b. [Member Nomination Report](#)

It was moved by Misty Flowers and seconded by Kathy Dinkel to approve the Consent Agenda items. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**FOR (10):**

Kathy Dinkel	Richard Hasty	Felicia Nelsen
Misty Flowers	Sara Hoyle	Susan Thomas
Rachael Folds	Terri Knutson	
Ron Giesselmann	Melissa Nance	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAIN (0):**

**ABSENT (5):**

Jarren Breeling	Vernon Davis	Lana Temple-Plotz
A'Jamal Byndon	Jessica Hilderbrand	

**MOTION CARRIED**

**5. Rules of Engagement & Activity**

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Executive Committee Member Dr. Hasty and Chair Jeanne Brandner led the group through a PowerPoint and activity. Members shared thoughts and ideas regarding the history of the Commission meetings and moving forward.

Policy Analyst Laura Opfer led the group through multicultural guidelines presentation. Members discussed multicultural guidelines for discussion. Misty Flowers added that it is important to break out of one's comfort zone

and to celebrate culture and differences. Flowers shared thoughts on previous experiences with the Commission. Ron Giesselmann proposed a subcommittee or workgroup that would focus on diversity and disparities. Kathy Dinkel proposed using multicultural guidelines as a filter for examining issues rather than separating a specific focus of the Commission. Dr. Hasty proposed circling back to the Rules of Engagement prior to discussion of Strategic Priorities.

Dr. Hasty led the group through an Engagement Activity. Member pairs reported out about each other after a brief discussion period.

## **6. Executive Committee Member Vote**

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Chair Brandner provided an overview of the Executive Committee and recent history of changes in the Governance Document. She outlined the reasoning for the changes of the Executive Committee section of the document. Laura Opfer added information regarding the role of the Executive Committee.

Members discussed nominating process and nominated Melissa Nance, Misty Flowers, Richard Hasty, Felicia Nelsen, and Lana Temple-Plotz as new members of the Executive Committee.

**It was moved by Kathy Dinkel and seconded by Susan Thomas to elect Melissa Nance, Misty Flowers, Felicia Nelsen, Richard Hasty, and Lana Temple-Plotz as members of the Executive Committee.** There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

### **FOR (10):**

Kathy Dinkel	Richard Hasty	Felicia Nelsen
Misty Flowers	Sara Hoyle	Susan Thomas
Rachael Folds	Terri Knutson	
Ron Giesselmann	Melissa Nance	

### **AGAINST (0):**

### **ABSTAIN (0):**

### **ABSENT (5):**

Jarren Breeling	Vernon Davis	Lana Temple-Plotz
A'Jamal Byndon	Jessica Hilderbrand	

### **MOTION CARRIED**

## **7. DHHS Update**

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Children and Family Services Director, Stephanie Beasley shared information regarding the contract transition from Saint Francis Ministries. She shared that all cases have been reviewed and transferred under DHHS in the Eastern Service Area. She noted that the things remain to be transferred such as auto leases, copiers, and office miscellanea. Beasley shared that all cases were staffed prior to transfer, and that the reviews involved many stakeholders including the FCRO, Guardian Ad Litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates. She noted that most teammates from Saint Francis made the transfer to DHHS, and she thanked workers from Saint Francis for transferring and making the transition smooth. She noted that all leadership has been hired.

Director Beasley continued by sharing an update regarding Families First Prevention and Services Act (FFPSA), that builds a mechanism for families to get support prior to entering deeper in the child welfare system. She noted that multiple providers have come to the table to look at Nebraska's workforce, the needs of kids and families, and provider capacity to implement new evidence-based practices. Beasley shared that Chapin Hall has made some recommendations for new evidence-based practices to be added.

Director Beasley shared information regarding the current work being done to implement additional rates and tiers to the foster care reimbursement rates in collaboration with the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee (FCRRC).

She noted that DHHS has added an additional tier to the Committee’s recommendations based on research done that show the need for additional tiers needed to support single case agreements. She added that DHHS is working with providers to determine the appropriate assessment to support the proposed rates. She thanked the FCRRRC for their work.

Director Beasley responded to a question regarding assistance prior to involvement. She noted that there is a federal definition for candidate for foster care that Nebraska has made as broad as possible that would allow for support prior to system involvement that includes a broad array of life experiences. She added that certain requirements are needed of the family and DHHS regarding prevention planning. She also shared the ability of DHHS to track the success of prevention services.

Director Beasley shared news that DHHS has recently posted job openings for a Family Advocacy Unit that will help families navigate the child welfare system. She noted that DHHS is looking for persons with lived experience, and that a college degree is not a requirement when a candidate has that lived experience.

Director Beasley shared an update regarding Alternative Response cases, noting that the randomizer has been removed and more families are being recommended for that service rather than recommended to Traditional Response to child abuse and neglect.

Director Beasley responded to a question regarding the Kinship Navigator Program and noted that it was recently expanded. She offered to provide more information on this expansion at the subsequent Commission meeting, but she noted the intent of the program is to place children with relative and kin first. She noted that this program is part of FFPSA and Nebraska does very well in this regard.

## **8. Legislative Update**

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Laura Opfer discussed relevant legislation during the most recent legislative session. She highlighted the Commission Bill Tracker located on the [Commission Website](#).

Sam Huppert, from the office of Senator Day, provided an update from the Senator.

Chair Brandner recognized Senator Brad Ashford for his work and shared condolences on his passing.

## **9. Committee Update & Chair Vacancies**

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- a. Alternative Response (AR) Committee** Monika Gross & Susan Thomas

AR Co-Chair Monika Gross provided an update regarding the AR Committee. She noted that the Committee has recently worked on developing strategic priorities. Co-Chair Gross noted that priorities include rights of AR participants and access to legal representation, availability and equitable access to services across the state, and oversight mechanisms. She noted that the AR Committee will continue to refine those priorities and determine appropriate subcommittees at the next AR meeting. Co-Chair Thomas agreed that oversight was a priority of particular interest. Gross added that the positions of the Committee are currently filled though the Committee continues to look for voices of those with lived-experience and an understanding of court and non-court cases.

- b. Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee** Laura Opfer

Laura Opfer noted the current Committee has been waiting for new Commission members to appoint a new co-chair. Current Co-Chair Christina Lloyd plans on leaving the Co-chair position after the May meeting. Opfer shared information regarding the history and recent work of the Committee, focusing particular on recent work done regarding sustainability and data evaluation of the B2i program. She noted that the Committee continues to look at preparing participants for entry into B2i and their exit.

- c. Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee (FCRRRC)** Felicia Nelsen

Co-Chair Felicia Nelsen shared that there FCRRRC has recently been working with DHHS regarding additional tiers and rates being implemented per the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibilities tool. She provided information regarding the work being done planning for the future and assessing the increases in foster care rates in 2024. Laura Opfer noted that the FCRRRC will be assessing the increases and determining rate increases in 2024. Opfer noted that Committee is open to receive feedback and projects as needed.

d. Juvenile Services Committee (JSC)

Deb VanDyke-Ries

Laura Opfer noted that current workgroups have been working with DHHS regarding the YRTC 5-year plan and other items such as exploring accreditation, youth voice, and racial and ethnic disparities (RED) data pertaining to YRTC committed youth. Additionally, Opfer noted the RED workgroup has been focused on RED planning in communities.

e. Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee

Misty Flowers

Laura Opfer and Adam Anderson provided an update regarding the work of the Committee. Opfer noted recommendations have involved Transition Aged Youth advocates within DHHS; advocates who focus on older youth in the system. Anderson shared that the Committee is also looking at strategic priorities. He added that a Co-chair is needed for the SFA.

Commission Chair Brandner noted that a majority of the work done to inform the recommendations of the Commission is done at the Committee level.

## 10. Strategic Priorities

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Dr. Hasty provided information regarding a strategic priorities exercise. Laura Opfer provided history regarding the current strategic priorities and what specific steps can be taken regarding those priorities. Members discussed the role the Commission will take regarding LB1173.

Small groups were formed to discuss strategic priorities. Groups reported out on specific priorities.

Group 1 reported that the ESA Transition and Placement Stability priority could be removed. The group noted that RED discussion resulted in a decision to keep this priority and expansion may be needed. Additionally, prevention continuum discussion resulted in a need to expand this priority to include RED factors and educational needs. Group 1 also noted a continued need to focus on Alternative Response.

Group 2 reported that the prevention continuum continues to be a needed priority, and many items were discussed to the need including access to services and how individuals become aware of how to access them. The group also noted juvenile detention as a needed priority, including length of stay, and how the youth is involved in the system. Additionally, the group noted a focus on relative and kinship placement is needed.

Group 3 reported a priority need of foster care placements. The group noted that there is a shortage nationally of foster homes and the discussed how the Commission may be able to help inform the legislature on this need and improvement, including relative and kinship placement. The group also reported the need for mental health services and culturally appropriate mental health services. The group also noted that this priority also tied into the YRTC priority. Additionally, the group thought about the impact of COVID on child welfare. Lastly, the group discussed whether there is a role for the Commission regarding Trafficking and collaboration with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation trafficking grant.

Group 4 thought that prevention continuum and placement stability needed to stay as priorities. The group discussed the need for placement solutions as that may affect placement stability, particularly for older youth. The group discussed lifting up the voice of families in care that would tie into the work around RED. The group also discussed relative and kinship care and that more support is needed to strengthen decisions made regarding appropriateness. Lastly, the group discussed strategies for youth aged 14 and up.

Chair Brandner noted that discussion and voting on strategic priorities will be deferred to the next meeting.

## 11. Annual Report Process

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Laura Opfer provided an update regarding the process. She noted that she will begin drafting the reports and at the August meeting, the Commission will vote on approving the committee and Commission reports.

## 12. Governance Document

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Chair Brandner shared information regarding the Governance Document. She highlighted unique aspects of the document and noted that it is possible to change the document if needed.

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**13. Public Comment**

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Chair Brandner opened the floor for public comment. Public Comment was received by Nathan Arentsen, who provided comment alleging the possibility of DHHS not qualifying for Title IV-E and other Federal Funding due to violation of Federal non-discrimination laws governing those funds. Arentsen distributed handouts describing those laws and the alleged possibility of disqualification. Arentsen also shared information regarding such investigation into the matter. Arentsen urged the Commission to express concern to DHHS about its alleged current federal violations in light of its possible denial of those funds, and to instruct DHHS to eliminate the alleged discriminatory policy towards male victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, and to remedy any past alleged victims of discrimination.

Chair Brandner thanked Arentsen for the information and noted that Commission will review the information and await the outcome of the pending action described.

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**14. New Business**

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There was none.

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**15. Upcoming Meeting Planning**

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August 23, 2022

November 1, 2022

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**16. Adjourn**

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The meeting adjourned at 2:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Adam Anderson