

Governance and Organizational Structure

February 22, 2024

Mission Statement

The Nebraska Children’s Commission works as a high-level leadership body with membership from the legislative, executive, and judicial branches along with system stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. 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.

Commission Structure

The Commission includes gubernatorial appointments, State Court Administrator appointments, and ex-officio positions. The Commission serves as an umbrella for statutory committees and Commission created workgroups. These groups are referred to in this document as “second tier groups.” Second tier groups may create smaller groups, which are referred to as “third tier groups.”

Commission Member Engagement & Expectations

Members are expected to attend Commission meetings.

Commission member attendance is essential. Commission members are expected to attend each meeting. Members should contact Commission staff as soon as possible if they are unable to attend a meeting.

The Commission requires a majority of voting members to be present to conduct business as per the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. If a voting Commission member misses two or more consecutive meetings, the Chair will contact the member to discuss attendance. The Chair and member will come to a resolution to ensure attendance, including resignation if the member is unable to regularly attend.

Recognition that though the Commission is made up of voting and non-voting Members, it is crucial to get input from all Members.

Recognizing the importance of the insight of non-voting members, decision-making is a process whereby all members’ opinions are heard during meetings.

Members are encouraged to serve on a second or third tier group.

Commission members are encouraged to actively participate in at least one second or third tier group. Commission members are highly encouraged to serve in chair positions. Because Commission members attend the larger meetings, they have a more global understanding of the Commission’s goals that is helpful to the work of second or third tier groups.

Members will be prepared to discuss topics and participate in decision-making

Meeting materials will be provided to Commission members five business days in advance of the meeting. Commission members should thoroughly review the materials in preparation to discuss or take action on the materials. Commission members are encouraged to communicate thoughts or feedback on the materials to the Executive Committee or Commission staff in advance of the meeting.

New members will participate in orientation

New Commission members will become familiar with the goals and history of the Commission and identify opportunities for participation in subgroups by participating in an orientation with the Executive Committee and/or staff held in a small group setting to encourage engagement. They will be provided the governance and structure of the Commission as reference documents as they become more familiar in their role. Seasoned commission members will be assigned to mentor new members to become familiar with their role.

Governance Procedures

The Commission will meet at least quarterly.

The Commission will meet at least quarterly with additional meetings at the discretion of the Chairperson. Contact, education, and work of Commission Members through subgroups will be completed in between formal meetings. Regular information on the progress of the subgroups will be sent a month prior to Commission meetings to allow all members to prepare for discussion.

All Members shall disclose their potential conflicts in a written statement.

Commission members are required to fill out a conflict of interest statement. Members should update their statement whenever any relevant information changes. The conflict of interest statement is not intended to prohibit Members from voting—refraining from a vote is at the discretion of each individual Member.

Commission Member Profile.

A Commission Member profile list will be maintained by Commission staff and shared with Commission members. This list includes each member's name, title, employer, position filled on the Commission, committees and/or workgroups served on, whether they serve as a chairperson of a committee and/or workgroup, and any other identifying information or associations that would lend to understanding of the expertise they bring to the table as well as the roles they represent—both as members and as employees of agencies they may be representing.

Commission members are prohibited from benefit from the work of the Commission or any Committee.

As per [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202\(6\)](#) and [43-4203\(9\)](#) If anyone—a Commission or subgroup member—believes that a chair or member of such is misusing their position in some way or does have a conflict that has not been discussed and/or disclosed, that person may inform the chairperson of the Commission to resolve the matter. No member shall have any private financial interest, profit, or benefit from any work of the Commission.

Executive Committee, Powers, & Terms

The Executive Committee of the Commission consists of a Chair, Vice-Chair, and three at-large members. At least one member must have served one prior term on the Nebraska Children's Commission, three members must be voting representatives and at least one member will be a minority reflective of Nebraska's disproportionate minority representation of children in foster care. The Executive Committee positions are a two year commitment.

The Commission delegates the Executive Committee to set the agenda and work with staff to ensure the work of the Commission, Committees, and Workgroups progresses and priorities are established. The Executive Committee may appoint interim chair positions for second tier groups, and may remove/suspend members of second tier groups for misconduct. The Executive Committee may testify and approve testimony and action consistent with previously approved Commission or Committee work with a majority approval (at least 3 votes) if the decision is time sensitive.

Nonvoting and Voting members may serve on the Executive Committee.

Because the Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office assists in employing Commission staff (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202 (4)) and "for administrative purposes, the offices of the staff of the commission shall be located in the Foster Care Review Office," ([Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4202 \(4\)](#)), the Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office shall function in an advisory capacity and act as a resource to the Executive Committee. The Commission's budget is under the Foster Care Review Office. Having the Foster Care Review Office Executive Director as a resource to the Executive Committee will help with clear management, understanding, and coordination of Commission activities.

Election of the Executive Committee shall occur during the first Commission meeting of every odd-numbered year. Election of officials may occur by secret ballot. (Total number of votes for each nominee must be recorded in the meeting minutes). Each newly appointed executive member's term will begin at the second Commission meeting of

the year, and both current and newly elected executive committee members will participate in planning and decision making between these two meetings.

Commission Staff

In consultation with the Executive Committee of the Commission, priorities for projects are determined by statutory requirements and available resources. The staff consist of two employees who are responsible for the day to day operations of the Commission.

The Policy Analyst is responsible for drafting reports for subgroups and the Commission, applying the Commission policy filters to introduced legislative bills and preparing testimony as approved by the Commission, assisting with meeting facilitation, and keeping Commission members up to date on policy related to the Commission's priorities.

The Administrative Programs Officer II is responsible for scheduling and planning meetings, preparing meeting materials, submitting approved reports to the appropriate audiences, and ensuring the Nebraska Open Meetings Act is followed appropriately. This position is also responsible for tracking member appointments and maintaining membership profiles.

Consent Agenda

The Commission may utilize a consent agenda. The consent agenda may include approving the agenda, approving minutes, receiving reports, and other items that do not need discussion. All materials on the consent agenda must be made available to the members for review prior to the meeting. Efforts should be made to distribute information at least 5 business days, but no less than 1 business day prior to the meeting. This will reduce the Commission meeting time spent on informational reports that can be reviewed in advance. During discussion of the consent agenda motion, a member may ask to pull an item from the consent agenda and put it on the regular agenda.

Open Meetings Act

The Nebraska Children's Commission and all statutory subgroups are subject to the Nebraska Open Meetings Act as outlined in Neb. Rev. Stat. [§84-1407](#) to [§84-1414](#). A quorum of voting and non-voting members is required to hold a meeting and a quorum of voting members is required to take any action.

When possible, the Commission will work to utilize videoconferencing to accommodate members and public who reside outside of the vicinity of the regular meeting locations. Members may be asked to assist in the videoconference arrangements in order to adhere to statutory requirements. Non-statutory subgroups are not subject to the Open Meetings Act, and thus, have more flexibility in their membership as well as the use of teleconferencing and other such resources.

Process for Substantive Recommendations to and by the Commission

Work of Committees and Workgroups

At the current time there are various levels or "tiers" to the Commission subgroup structure. While the Commission and Executive Committee comprise the first tier, the second tier consists of subgroups set forth in statute as well as ad hoc Commission subgroups created to address priority issues. The third tier is comprised of informal subgroups that take on specific tasks and function on limited timelines.

Creation and Dissolution of Subgroups

Statutory Committees may create subgroups to work on statutory mandates as long as the membership does not constitute a quorum of the Committee. The Committee must provide clear expectations to the subgroup, including goals, timeline, and expected work products.

The Commission must approve the formation of new subgroups outside of the Committee's statutory mandates.

Subgroups will evaluate their progress on an annual basis and inform the Commission if all assigned tasks have been completed, at which point the dissolution of the subgroup will be considered. The dissolution process will vary depending if the subgroup is statutory or Commission created.

Scope of Subgroups

Commission approval is required for any projects taken on by the subgroups that fall outside of the scope of its statutory requirements.

Chairpersons

At least one chair of each second tier subgroups must be a member of the Commission, either voting or nonvoting. If a Commission member chair requests a co-chair between Commission meetings, the Executive Committee may appoint an interim co-chair, and the appointment shall be put before the Commission at the next opportunity. Third tier subgroups are more informal and the Chair appointments for these groups are at the discretion of the second tier leadership.

Chairpersons of second and third tier subgroups will be reviewed in January of even numbered years. Chairpersons may request to be reappointed after each two year term. The Executive Committee may appoint interim chairs to statutory committees between Commission meetings.

The terms of chairs of second and third tier groups who have served for at least two years will come to an end with the option to request reappointment.

Membership of Workgroups & Committees

The membership of statutory groups shall be approved by the Commission. Membership may include voting members and non-voting resource members. In all cases, regardless of the structural level, the composition of a subgroup should be balanced to ensure that no one agency/organization has an advantage. Unless there is a need identified by the Commission, there should be no more than one member representing one agency/organization as members of a subgroup.

Unless otherwise provided for in statute, each second tier group will have two year term limits for members. Members may request reappointment at the end of their membership term. The terms of a member of any second tier group who has served for two years or more will come to an end with the option to request reappointment, unless otherwise provided for in statute. If a membership term expires between Commission meetings, the membership will continue until the member is reappointed or replaced.

The Executive Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission may remove or suspend members of second tier groups at its discretion. Grounds for removal may include: missing two consecutive meetings or one half of the meetings held in a year; exhibiting controlling or monopolizing behaviors at a meeting; a change in member's employment or role; allegations of or actual conflict of interest or use of the group for personal benefit; undertaking actions or behavior inconsistent with the purposes and objectives of the Nebraska Children's Commission; and/or displaying disrespect to a chairperson, member, staff person, presenter, or participant at a meeting. Prior to removal or suspension, a member of the Executive Committee will contact the member as an attempt to reach a solution.

Commission Recommendations

Integrating recommendations of internal Workgroups and Committees

Updates and reports should be provided to the Commission on a regular basis, either through agenda presentations or informational reports, with any formal recommendations received no later than the last Commission meeting of the calendar year. All recommendations from the subgroups must be approved by a vote of the Commission prior to action being taken. Recommendations will be integrated into the annual report, with a link to the full report provided in the annual report.

Testimony at Public Hearings

The Commission may provide testimony at public hearings on child welfare and juvenile justice related legislative bills, legislative resolutions, proposed regulation changes and other public hearings in proponent, opponent, and neutral capacities. The Executive Committee members, policy analyst or the Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office can testify on matters related to the administration of the Commission. The policy analyst will apply the policy filter to introduced bills each legislative session and provide the prioritized bills to the Legislative Workgroup to suggest what level of support or opposition the Commission should provide. The Executive Committee will make the final determination based on the Legislative Workgroup feedback and discussion. Additionally, any relevant recommendations, research, reports, or other material previously approved by the Commission may be provided at a legislative hearing either through spoken or written testimony without additional approval of the Commission, provided such testimony is informative in nature and presented in a neutral capacity.

Members of the Commission may not testify on behalf of the Commission without prior approval from the Commission. Individuals may testify in public hearings in their capacity as stakeholders of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and reference their membership in the context of their interest to the public hearing, however, must distinguish their testimony does not reflect the position of the Commission.