

Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee

February 7, 2024
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Virtual or
Foster Care Review Office
1225 L St
Ste 401
Lincoln, NE 68508

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Co-Chair, Ron Giesselmann, called the meeting of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee to order at 10:02 AM, and asked attendees to introduce themselves. Roll call was taken through introductions.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Committee Members present (7):

Crystal Aldmeyer	Misty Flowers	Denisha Seals (10:30 AM)
Stephanie Bizzarri	Ron Giesselmann	
Deanna Brakhage	Bailey Perry	

Committee Members absent (2):

Payne Ackerman	Sarah Nixon
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Ex-Officio Members present (2):

Jeremy Behrends
Monika Gross

Ex-Officio Members absent (1):

Theresa Cusic

A quorum was established.

Guests In Attendance (4):

Amanda Adams
Adam Anderson
Valencia Elliot
Brian Rader

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 at the sign in table and on the Nebraska Children's Commission website.

III. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by **Stephanie Bizzarri** and seconded by **Bailey Perry** to approve the agenda as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (6):

Crystal Aldmeyer
Stephanie Bizzarri

Deanna Brakhage
Misty Flowers

Ron Giesselmann
Bailey Perry

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (2):

Payne Ackerman

Denisha Seals

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of Minutes

It was moved by **Deanna Brakhage** to approve the **June 6, 2023 minutes as presented**. The motion was seconded by **Crystal Aldmeyer**. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (5):

Crystal Aldmeyer
Stephanie Bizzarri

Deanna Brakhage
Ron Giesselmann

Bailey Perry

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (1):

Misty Flowers

ABSENT (3):

Payne Ackerman

Sarah Nixon

Denisha Seals

MOTION CARRIED

V. Co-Chair Report

Amanda Adams noted that the response to LB 1173 is available on the Commission website and noted that it contains responses to each of the recommendations of the 1173 Workgroup. Adams also shared that the Commission had a retreat in November and invited all the Committee Co-Chairs. She added that the Commission plans to start working on the recommendations discussed during the retreat. Stephanie Bizzarri noted that the retreat was a great time.

VI. Membership Update

Adam Anderson shared membership openings on the committee of a Current of Former Foster Parent, Gaurdian Ad Litem who practices in juvenile court, a Parent who has experience in the foster care system, a Representative of Child Welfare Advocacy Organization, and a Young Adult who has experience in the foster care system. Crystal Aldmeyer noted that Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has a stipend program available through their Leadership Opportunity Stipend. Young adults would reach out to Aldmeyer.

VII. Strategic Priorities

Amanda Adams noted that the strategic priorities have been a standing item for the last few meetings, but through the discussion at the Commission retreat it was determined that some decisions will need to be made regarding the priorities that the Committees would like to see move forward.

VIII. Legislative Update

Amanda Adams shared updates regarding current legislation. She shared specifics regarding the following: LB 827 enacts the child performer protection act. Adams thought that this could tie in to trafficking conversation.

LB 926 changes specifics regarding child labor laws and changes offense level. It also allows the Commission of Labor to subpoena during their investigation.

LB 945 requires certain documents and information be provided to foster children before leaving foster care. Co-Chair Ackerman testified in support of this legislation for the Children's Commission.

LB 967 changes provisions for trafficking offenses and provisions for survivors' assistance fund. Adams noted it better defines labor and sex-trafficking.

LB 1141 changes provisions of the student discipline act and provides a less restrictive student environment. Adams noted that it prevents removals from school in certain circumstances.

LB 1167 changes Sex Offender Registry requirements for certain trafficking related offenses. Adams noted that it adds a lot of labor trafficking.

LB 1209 appropriates funds to DHHS to increase funding for emergency shelter.

LB 1408 requires trafficking notifications in hotels and hotels to train employees in trafficking.

LB 1417 doesn't relate to this committee specifically, but Adams noted changes may affect the Children's Commission's committees. She also noted that the Foster Care Review Office would come under the authority of the Commission.

Monika Gross, noted that there is a lot of opposition to LB 1417, but she encouraged members to reach out in opposition, if so inclined. She noted that the FCRO doesn't expect it to pass, but it does affect many boards and commissions. Gross also spoke about LR 298 that would create a Legislative Committee to examine Legislative Branch oversight and whether oversight provided by statutory boards and commissions may be able to come under the Legislature.

Misty Flowers shared that LB 233 looks at TANF for families, and there is a child support penalty where outstanding child support payments can be accessed through the TANF funds and go to the state. She continued and shared that LB 290 would adjust the standard of need each year and increase the TANF aid amounts. Amanda Adams noted that each of the TANF fund bills are carryover bills. Misty also shared that LB 911 is an ICWA data collection bill. She noted that they are working with ACLU regarding this bill. Adams will notify the Committee when it is scheduled for hearing.

IX. Normalcy Subcommittee

Stephani Bizzarri noted that the Subcommittee recently met to discuss the changes in the Normalcy Plan and Report template as well as the process. She discussed the process of breaking into sub-groups to review the plans submitted by the facilities. Amanda Adams noted that DHHS has streamlined the process by only requiring one plan and two reports, delivered on December 1 of each year. She added that the facilities only have to submit one plan and then changes as needed.

Amanda Adams noted that Co-Chair Ackerman spoke about a process for physical inspection. Adams noted that she would be discussing a physical site review with DHHS in the near future.

X. APPLA Subcommittee

Amanda Adams noted that APPLA is not active at the moment but will be available if needed.

XI. Trafficking Subcommittee

Co-Chair Giesselmann shared information regarding the Attorney General's Trafficking Report. He noted an increasing trend of convictions, with nine convictions in 2023. He added that the report talks about training and getting reports from the public by education. He shared that the plan for the AG in 2024 will be to focusing on community outreach and specifically in communities that will be getting casinos. He said that shows foresight in the process, as casinos can often act as hubs for trafficking.

Amanda Adams shared that B2i has a workgroup that is looking at Immigration Status. One topic that was discussed was the topic that immigrant youth that are aging out are vulnerable to labor trafficking. Stephanie Bizzarri shared that she would like to discuss potential recommendations to bring to the Committee.

XII. Foster Parent Demographics

Amanda Adams shared Nebraska Children's Commission Foster Home Parent demographics [spreadsheet](#). She discussed the breakdown. She noted specific racial and ethnic disparities among Native Americans and Hispanic youth.

Monika Gross noted that the FCRO generally doesn't receive complaints based on disparities. She added that the FCRO has noted that kinship/relative homes have better outcomes, but do not normally receive complaints.

Brian Rader asked if "active foster homes" means the number with active placements. Adams will follow up regarding this and the discrepancy regarding Hispanic foster homes.

Monika Gross noted that up to 10% of homes are not identified by race.

Denisha Seals shared stories regarding racial and ethnic disparities. Adams will share information with Seals regarding the Lived-Experience Workgroup.

Monika Gross explained the process for reviewing the cases by the FCRO and inviting participation by all members in the case.

XIII. New Business

Amanda Adams noted that Theresa Cusic was going to come and discuss the Court Improvement Project's research project on court reports and the documents that youth and foster parents submit to the court. She added that Theresa will be at the subsequent meeting for discussion.

XIV. Public Comment

Valencia Elliot, from Greater Works Network discussed what programs are actually helping families and foster youth directly. Monika Gross shared that Families Inspiring Families has taken over for the Nebraska Family Support Network. Adams also noted that she will reach out to Families Inspiring Families.

XV. Upcoming Meetings:

- a. June 5, 2024, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM

XVI. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:18 AM