

Alternative Response (AR) Advisory Committee

September 17, 2026

1:00 PM – 3:00 PM.

Otoe Conference Room, Nebraska State Office Building
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Co-Chair Monika Gross called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM, welcomed everyone, and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. Administrative Programs Officer Adam Anderson tracked roll call through introductions.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Committee Members present (8):

Jacie Boelts
Jennifer Carter
Monika Gross
Hazell Rodriguez

Heather Sikyta
Ivy Svoboda
Susan Thomas
Schalisha Walker

Committee Members absent (3):

Jarren Breeling
Sara Hoyle

Bri McLarty

A quorum was established.

Guests In Attendance (4):

Adam Anderson
Zac Ross

Susanne Shalt
Meghan Svik

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

A motion was made by Heather Sikyta to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Jacie Boelts. There was no discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (7):

Jacie Boelts
Jennifer Carter
Monika Gross

Heather Sikyta
Ivy Svoboda
Susan Thomas

Schalisha Walker

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (1):

Hazell Rodriguez

ABSENT (3):

Jarren Breeling

Sara Hoyle

Bri McLarty

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of June 5, 2026 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Jennifer Carter to approve the June 5, 2026 meeting minutes with corrections to the roll call to indicate Heather Sikyta was absent. The motion was seconded by Ivy Svoboda.

There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (7):

Jacie Boelts

Jennifer Carter

Monika Gross

Heather Sikyta

Ivy Svoboda

Susan Thomas

Schalisha Walker

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (1):

Hazell Rodriguez

ABSENT (3):

Jarren Breeling

Sara Hoyle

Bri McLarty

MOTION CARRIED

V. Co-Chair Update

Co-Chair Monika Gross provided updates on recent Commission and legislative activities:

- **Annual Report:** The Nebraska Children's Commission (NCC) submitted its annual report prior to the September 1 deadline. While this specific advisory committee is not statutorily-mandated to submit a standalone report, a summary update was drafted on the committee's progress.

- **LB 845 / Opposition Summary:** Co-Chair Gross drafted a summary of public testimony opposing LB 845 from the past legislative session. The bill initially contained language that would have eliminated the Alternative Response Advisory Committee. Due to strong public opposition highlighting that this committee provides crucial, independent system oversight, transparency, and accountability for vulnerable child welfare populations, that section of the bill was removed and the committee was preserved.
- **Priorities & Workgroup Structure:** Reviewing the productive discussions from the June 5th meeting regarding Alternative Response (AR), Traditional Response (TR), and the prevention continuum, Co-Chair Gross recommended streamlining the committee's focus into **three workgroups** instead of four.
- **Statutory Changes (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 28-712):**
 - Language was added to statute regarding non-accepted/no-further-action reports and completed TR cases: If DHHS determines no further action is required after an intake or investigation, the family can now be formally referred for a **Prevention Case** to connect with community resources.
 - Jacie Boelts (DHHS) clarified that a "prevention case" is tracked under DHHS Central Office rather than local field offices. Prevention cases are voluntary, do not carry an assigned caseworker, and are **not** classified or tracked as accepted AR or TR intakes.
 - Services tied to Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) funding include *Family Centered Treatment (FCT)*, *Healthy Families America (HFA)*, *Parents as Teachers (PAT)*, and *Circle of Security*.
- **Discussion on Prevention, AR, and Legal Access:**
 - Members discussed how prevention cases function when transitioning out of TR or AR, noting that if safety concerns re-emerge, a new intake must be called in.
 - Committee members raised operational questions regarding whether County Attorneys or 1184 team members have system access to see prior prevention case history or discuss them during 1184 team meetings. Jacie Boelts committed to following up with DHHS legal regarding system visibility and 1184 meeting rules.
- **Budget & Funding Requests:**
 - The NCC budget was submitted alongside the Foster Care Review Office budget.
 - Because the majority of the Commission's small budget covers staff salaries/benefits with minimal operational funds left over, the Commission requested additional funding in the next biennium.
 - Funding was specifically requested from the Meta Platforms settlement funds dedicated to youth mental health. An ad hoc advocacy group is forming to establish talking points for legislative outreach.

VI. Membership Update

Adam Anderson delivered the membership status report:

- **New Members:** Welcomed **Hazell Rodriguez** (*Legal Aid of Nebraska*) and **Sara Hoyle** (*Lancaster County Human Services* - absent) to the committee.
- **Reappointments:** All existing committee members present were officially reapproved for an additional two-year term by the Children's Commission at their August 11 meeting.
- **Vacancies:** The committee continues to seek representatives for **Law Enforcement** (following up with LPD/York County Sheriff leads) and a **Guardian ad Litem** (to replace Michelle Paxton). Hazell Rodriguez offered to post the GAL vacancy on the juvenile law listserv.
- **Tribal Representation:** The Commission is actively working with the Commission on Indian Affairs to fill the tribal representative seat to ensure consistent tribal engagement.

VII. Commission and Legislative Update

Child Welfare Policy Analyst Zac Ross provided updates on strategic planning and upcoming legislative resolution (LR) hearings:

- **NCC Strategic Goals (2026–2028):** Approved at the August 11 Commission meeting. Staff and leadership are meeting weekly with Bagley Strategies to turn strategic goals into actionable workflow processes.
- **Interbranch Coordination Discussion:** In response to member queries regarding legislative relationship-building, Co-Chair Gross and Zac Ross explained that internal survey results showed strong existing alignment/traction with the Legislature, whereas primary points of friction and lowest coordination existed with the Executive Branch (Governor's Policy Research Office and DHHS). Future action plans aim to strengthen coordination across all branches.
- **Legislative Resolutions & Interim Study Hearings:**
 - **LR 403 (Senator Rountree):** Youth/Juvenile justice interim study scheduled for testimony on Monday.
 - **LR 452 (Senator Spivey):** Cross-system funding resolution examining child welfare and juvenile justice funding streams, set for hearing in October.
 - **LR 380 & LR 425:** Resolutions focused on YRTC facilities and youth shackling. Committee members noted an upcoming legislative tour of facilities in Omaha and Hastings.
 - **LR 413:** Guardianship expansion resolution; currently awaiting hearing scheduling.
 - **Year-End Legislative Hearing:** An annual legislative briefing on the Commission's work will likely be scheduled in December.

VIII. DHHS Data and Updates

Jacie Boelts provided a [PowerPoint](#) with program data and updates regarding Alternative Response and prevention services:

- **Family Centered Treatment (FCT) Volume:** Currently tracking approximately **116 active FCT cases**, with 21 actively transitioning into prevention status upon completing Phase 1 of treatment.
- **Warm Line & Community Collaboratives:** DHHS continues partnership with United Way to operate the "Warm Line," directing non-intake community calls and referrals directly to local community collaboratives.
- **Grant Funding & Training:** DHHS received grant funding aimed at strengthening warm-handoff referrals to community collaboratives and expanding Motivational Interviewing (MI) training to reduce family reentry into the AR/formal child welfare system.

IX. Workgroup Discussion & Establishment

Co-Chair Monika Gross reviewed the committee's re-structuring plan to ensure work aligns directly with the Commission's strategic priorities.

- **Reorganization:** Based on priority discussions from the June 5 meeting, Co-Chair Gross proposed consolidating the previous four structure areas into **three focused workgroups**:
 1. *Data & Oversight Workgroup*
 2. *Engagement & Effectiveness Workgroup*
 3. *Prevention-Intervention Continuum Workgroup*
- **Membership Drive:** Sign-up sheets were distributed. Co-Chair Gross encouraged members to invite outside stakeholders and subject matter experts to join workgroups.

A motion was made by Heather Sikyta to approve the creation of the Data & Oversight, Engagement & Effectiveness, and Prevention-Intervention Continuum Workgroups, in place of the

previously established workgroups. The motion was seconded by Susan Thomas. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (8):

Jacie Boelts
Jennifer Carter
Monika Gross
Hazell Rodriguez

Heather Sikyta
Ivy Svoboda
Susan Thomas
Schalisha Walker

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (3):

Jarren Breeling
Sara Hoyle
Bri McLarty

MOTION CARRIED

X. New Business

There was no new business.

XI. Public Comment

Co-Chair Monika Gross opened the floor to public comment. There was no public comment.

XII. Upcoming Meetings:

Tentatively December 10, 2026, 10:00 AM

XIII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:48.

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Anderson