

Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee

October 30, 2025
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Lower Level Sarpy Conference Room
Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Richard Hasty called the meeting of the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee to order at 10:05 a.m. and asked Adam Anderson to call roll.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Committee Members present (8):

Terry Gibbs
Richard Hasty
Camas Holder
Angela Jarecki
Felipe Longoria-Shinn

Monalisa McGee
Camille Ohri
Proxy for Sami Spain, Hanna Olafson

Committee Members absent (5):

Dylan Graeve
Brandy Gustoff
Sarah Mitchell

Susan Thomas
Kitty Washburn

Ex-Officio Members present (0):

Ex-Officio Members absent (4):

Jennifer Skala
Colton Stogdill

Theresa Cusic
Brooke Fuhr

A quorum was present.

Guests In Attendance (5):

Omar Ambrose
Adam Anderson
Deanna Brakhage

Chloe Fowler
Jenna Joya

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.

*Minutes do not follow the order of the agenda.

III. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Monalisa McGee and seconded by Terry Gibbs to approve the agenda as presented.

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

FOR (8):

Terry Gibbs
Richard Hasty
Camas Holder
Angela Jarecki

Felipe Longoria-Shinn
Monalisa McGee
Camille Ohri
Proxy for Sami Spain, Hanna Olafson

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (5):

Dylan Graeve
Brandy Gustoff
Sarah Mitchell

Susan Thomas
Kitty Washburn

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Camas Holder and seconded by Terry Gibbs to approve the July 17, 2025 minutes as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (8):

Terry Gibbs
Richard Hasty
Camas Holder
Angela Jarecki

Felipe Longoria-Shinn
Monalisa McGee
Camille Ohri
Proxy for Sami Spain, Hanna Olafson

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (5):

Dylan Graeve
Brandy Gustoff
Sarah Mitchell

Susan Thomas
Kitty Washburn

MOTION CARRIED

V. Co-Chair Report

Chair Richard Hasty reminded the committee that it is set to sunset in mid-2026, and Nebraska Children's Commission (NCC) voted to create the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee (subcommittee), effective July 1, 2026.

- The committee structure, duties, and governing rules will remain unchanged until July 1, 2026.

- The statutory obligation for the annual report will be transferred to the Children's Commission. Next year's report will come from the Children's Commission.
- Discussions will continue at the NCC level to determine the new subcommittee's structure, including membership and adherence to the Open Meetings Act..

VI. Policy Analyst Update

Chloe Fowler, Child Welfare Policy Analyst, provided the following updates:

- Current Activities: Reviewing Normalcy Reports, attending the Children's Summit, touring the Kearney YRTC, and attending the Attorney General's Human Trafficking Task Force summit.
- AI Policy: A simple bill is being drafted for the Legislature to create regulations regarding the use of AI in submitting reports, citing data privacy and confidentiality concerns, especially concerning children. A senator is being sought to carry the bill.
- NCC Hearing: The Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee hearing for the Children's Commission is scheduled for December 5th. The time and location are pending.
- Legislative Member Appointments to NCC:
 - Judiciary: Senator Victor Rountree
 - Appropriations: Senator Christie Armendariz.
 - HHS: Senator Glen Meyer.
- Interim Studies:
 - Truancy (Senator Kauth): No legislation will be moved forward due to the state budget, but a report on sound policy reform regarding truancy is being created.
 - LR 89: Examines affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities.
 - LR 213: Focuses on neighborhood-level investment outcomes on children.
- LB 296 Discussion (Centralized Education Record System):
 - LB 296, passed last year, requires the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to create a centralized education record system for system-involved youth, including foster youth, to prevent loss of credits and ease graduation.
 - Action: Chloe is scheduled to meet with Lane Carr (NDE designee) the following morning to discuss his role in developing the system. The committee requested that Fowler also ask about the inclusion of students transferring from out-of-state, particularly those moving from border states like Kansas and Missouri.
- B2I Funding: In response to a question, it was confirmed that the current potential federal shutdown has no impact on B2I funding, as most funding is state based. There is a potential impact on young people who rely on SNAP benefits.

VII. Workgroup Discussion

- a. Data and Evaluation Workgroup
 - Chloe Fowler shared that the group has discussed an eligibility tracker (Deanna Brakhage has separate tracking for tribal youth, wards, adoptive parents, and guardianships), research on measuring success/self-sufficiency, information sharing between DHHS and Opportunity Passport, and recommendations for the next annual report.
- b. Sustainability Work Group
 - Co-Chair Felipe Longoria-Shinn reported low interest following an initial email and sought to re-engage members to develop the group's mission and goals.

- New Members: Angela Jarecki, Sarah Mitchell, Terrence Williams, Deanna Brakhage, Monalisa McGee and Kitty Washburn volunteered to join the work group. Longoria-Shinn will also share the email again for the broader public.
 - Action: Co-Chairs will proceed with setting up the initial meeting and will continue to seek more members, especially young adults.
- c. Expansion/Special Populations
- There was universal support for moving forward with this work group, which aims to review data to identify areas for policy and legislative improvements for specific populations.
 - The group lacks an identified leader.
 - Additional Suggested Population: Domestic violence youth survivors.
 - Action: Adam Anderson and/or Felipe Longoria-Shinn will send out another communication to seek a leader and members for the Special Populations Work Group.

VIII. Membership Update

Adam Anderson shared information regarding the membership of the Committees and the following updates:

- Missing Members: Two members were noted as missing from involvement: Douglas Beck and Mia Pokorny.
- Member Attendance Policy: The process for addressing non-attendance involves reaching out to members if they miss two meetings. Anderson noted that he gives members a wide benefit of the doubt for non-attendance in case their circumstances change and they are able to rejoin later. The current spot-holding by non-participating members was acknowledged as potentially holding up the rest of the group.
- Efforts will continue to recruit strong young adult members.

IX. DHHS Update

The following points were provided by Camas Holder during the meeting, offering specific data and program details:

- Eligibility and Enrollment Trends
 - Adoption Tracking: The program is now tracking additional eligibility for youth who finalized their adoption at age 16.
 - Eligible Youth: An estimated 66 youth will become eligible for B2I under this additional tracking.
 - Overall Enrollment: There is a dramatic increase in overall B2I enrollment, with an increasing trend being observed.
 - Acceptance Rate: The acceptance rate has improved significantly this year, reaching 90% compared to a previous rate of 50%. The program also noted a 90% response rate from eligible youth.
 - Probation Youth: In 2025, 18 probation youth were enrolled, which was within the expected range.
- Program Staffing and Metrics
 - Staffing Increase: The program has hired three additional ICs (Independent Living Case Managers).
 - Angela's Team: Now has 8 ICs.
 - Terrence's Team: Now has 10 ICs.
 - Success Metrics: The committee is having conversations about what success looks like for B2I youth, including reviewing data from NYTD surveys (National Youth in Transition Database).
- Pilot Program

- Driver's License Pilot: There is a Driver's License pilot program in Omaha designed to assist youth. The pilot includes access to a car for the test, and the provider operating the pilot also runs a driving school.
- Discussion Point
 - Marketing Input: Terrence Williams asked about the possibility of having marketing materials for the B2I program developed with input from B2I participants.

X. New Business

Adam Anderson shared information about a program for Angela Jarecki, who had to step away from the meeting. The discussion covered a new bi-weekly program developed by Angela Jarecki:

- Program Name: Thrive Forward: Life Skills for the Heart and Mind.
- Timeline: The program will be launching in two weeks.
- Target Audience: It is designed specifically for foster families and older teens ages 14 through 24.
- Goal: The focus is on helping youth develop the practical and emotional tools needed to live positively and independently.
- Topics Covered: The curriculum will cover subjects such as:
 - Emotional intelligence
 - Decision making
 - Positive mindset
 - Boundaries
 - Energetic hygiene (learning how to manage and protect personal energy)
- Session Details: Each session will be 90 minutes and will blend education, art-based activities, and experiential learning in a supportive environment.
- Follow-up: Committee members with more specific questions about the handout or curriculum were advised to reach out to Jarecki directly.

XI. Upcoming Meetings:

- a. January 22, 2026, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM Virtual

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:58 AM.