

**Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the  
Juvenile Services Committee (JSC) and the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ)**

January 22, 2026  
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Webex  
&  
FCRO Conference Room  
1225 L Street, Suite 401  
Lincoln, NE 68508

**1. Call to Order**

JSC Co-Chair Nick Juliano called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM, welcomed everyone and asked Adam Anderson to call roll.

**2. Roll Call**

**Juvenile Services Committee**

***Committee Members Present (11)***

Amoreena Brady  
Sarah Brownell  
Jennifer Carter  
Beverly Duran

Amy Hoffman  
Nick Juliano  
Judge Denise Kracl  
Dennis Marks

Paige McDowell  
Tammy Sassaman  
Deb VanDyke-Ries

***Committee Members Absent (4)***

Laura Lemoine  
Patrick Sailors

Vicky Smith  
Dr. Richard Wiener

***Committee Resource Members Present (4)***

Shaylee Fortner  
Proxy for Sen. Victor Rountree, Noah Boger  
Bethany Nelson  
Julie Smith

***Committee Resource Members Absent (0)***

**A quorum was established for the Juvenile Services Committee**

**Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

***Coalition Members Present (17)***

Lincoln Arneal  
Karen Bredthauer  
Breanna Flaherty  
Ingrid Ganseborn  
Monika Gross  
Amy Hoffman

Nandi Kumondan  
Mark LaBouchardiere  
Elaine Menzel  
Jaiden Nelsen  
Wathina Porter  
Adama Sawadogo

Teshawna Sawyer  
Dan Schleusener  
Steve Solorio  
Tami Steensma  
Lauren Walag

***Coalition Members Absent (4)***

Denise Manthei  
Kaleciana Perry

Erika Schwarting  
Myana Sigers

***Coalition Ex-Officio Members Present (1)***

Proxy for Sara Quiroz, Erin Curran

***Coalition Ex-Officio Members Absent (2)***

Judge Joel B. Jay  
Judge Candice Novak

**Guests in Attendance (4):**

Adam Anderson	Erin Wasserburger
Ryan Spohn	Allen Windle
John Turner	

*a. Notice of Publication*

Administrative Programs Officer for the Nebraska Children’s Commission, Adam Anderson, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Children’s Commission and Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar websites in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

*b. Announcement of the placement of Open Meeting Act information*

A copy of the Open Meetings Act was available for public inspection at the sign-in table and on the Nebraska Children’s Commission website.

**3. Approval of Agenda**

**A motion was made by Denise Kracl from the JSC and Breanna Flaherty from the NCJJ to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Tammy Sassaman from the JSC and Monika Gross from the NCJJ. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:**

**Juvenile Services Committee**

**FOR (10):**

Amoreena Brady	Amy Hoffman	Tammy Sassaman
Sarah Brownell	Nick Juliano	Deb VanDyke-Ries
Jennifer Carter	Judge Denise Kracl	
Beverly Duran	Paige McDowell	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (4):**

Laura Lemoine	Vicky Smith
Dennis Marks	Dr. Richard Wiener

**MOTION CARRIED for the Juvenile Services Committee**

**Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

**FOR (15):**

Lincoln Arneal	Amy Hoffman	Adama Sawadogo
Karen Bredthauer	Nandi Kumondan	Teshawna Sawyer
Breanna Flaherty	Mark LaBouchardiere	Daniel Schleusener
Ingrid Ganseborn	Elaine Menzel	Steve Solorio
Monika Gross	Jaiden Nelsen	Tami Steensma

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (0):**

**ABSENT (5):**

Denise Manthei	Kaleciana Perry
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**MOTION CARRIED for the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

*\*Minutes do not follow the approved agenda*

**4. Approval of October 23, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

A motion was made by Amy Hoffman from the JSC and Amy Hoffman from NCJJ to approve the October 23, 2025 meeting minutes with edits to the welcome, and attendance. The motion was seconded by Beverly Duran from the JSC and Karen Bredthauer from the NCJJ. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

**Juvenile Services Committee**

**FOR (9):**

Sarah Brownell  
Jennifer Carter  
Beverly Duran

Amy Hoffman  
Nick Juliano  
Judge Denise Kracl

Paige McDowell  
Tammy Sassaman  
Deb VanDyke-Ries

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (1):**

Amoreena Brady

**ABSENT (5):**

Laura Lemoine  
Dennis Marks

Patrick Sailors  
Vicky Smith

Dr. Richard Wiener

**MOTION CARRIED for the Juvenile Services Committee**

**Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

**FOR (11):**

Lincoln Arneal  
Karen Bredthauer  
Breanna Flaherty  
Ingrid Ganseborn

Monika Gross  
Amy Hoffman  
Mark LaBouchardiere  
Elaine Menzel

Wathina Porter  
Adama Sawadogo  
Teshawna Sawyer

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSTAINED (3):**

Jaiden Nelsen  
Daniel Schleusener  
Lauren Walag

**ABSENT (5):**

Nandi Kumondan  
Denise Manthei  
Kaleciana Perry

Erika Schwarting  
Myana Sigers

**MOTION CARRIED for the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice**

**5. NCJJ Chair and Vice Chair Elections**

John Turner provided a link for attending NCJJ members to vote for Chair and Vice Chair. **17 voting members of the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice voted to elect Elaine Menzel as the Chair and Breanna Flaherty as a Vice Chair for the NCJJ.** There were no write-in candidates.

#### 6. JSC/NCJJ Separation Discussion

The groups deliberated on how to maintain their collaborative relationship after they stop meeting jointly.

**The Liaison Strategy:** Elaine Menzel suggested that because some individuals serve on both committees, they could act as formal liaisons to report back to each group.

**Agenda Integration:** There was a consensus to add a permanent agenda item to each committee's separate meetings for "Cross-Committee Updates" to ensure a fluid flow of communication.

Jennifer Carter clarified the distinct roles of the groups. She noted the JSC focuses on system oversight—specifically out-of-home placement effectiveness and mental health service availability. In contrast, the NCJJ manages federal funding and community-based aid. The "overlap" occurs because NCJJ funding often supports the very systems the JSC oversees.

#### 7. Policy Analyst and Legislative Update

No update was provided. Policy Analyst Chloe Fowler will send an email update at a later time.

#### 8. YRTC Update

Mark LaBouchardiere provided an extensive update on the physical and cultural changes at the YRTC facilities.

**The Kearney Investigation:** He noted that there is an active investigation by the OIG, which the YRTCs are cooperating with. He emphasized that since the allegations began 10 months ago, no staff with substantial allegations remain on-site. He noted that the initial reports of misconduct came from YRTC staff reporting themselves, rather than from parents or youth. He added that since that time allegations have decreased.

**Architectural Privacy Issues:** LaBouchardiere noted that the current Kearney facility has communal showers and dorms with 24 youth to a room, which can lead to conflicts between rival gang members. The proposed "YRTC Omaha" (formerly NCYF) would offer individual rooms and private showers, which is expected to drastically reduce safety incidents.

**Accountability:** He stated that even when youth make false allegations, they are not punished, as the facility wants to ensure they always feel they have the "opportunity to say what they want" without fear of retribution.

**The "YRTC Omaha" Plan:** A major realignment was discussed to move male youth from Kearney to the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility (NCYF) in Omaha.

The facility would transition from the Department of Corrections to DHHS oversight and be renamed (potentially YRTC Omaha).

LaBouchardiere highlighted the benefits of this facility, including individual rooms with private showers and better outdoor recreation space compared to Kearney's communal setup.

**Gender-Based Moves:** If the boys move to Omaha, the plan involves moving female youth from their current congested location in Hastings to the Kearney campus to utilize its superior amenities, such as the gym and heated swimming pool.

Sarah Brownell shared the updated process of monthly update summary that includes a new reporting template.

Lauren Walag shared information regarding transportation as well as some behavior exhibited by her clients placed at YRTC Kearney. LaBouchardiere responded by sharing the updated notification process regarding PREA, including horseplay, minor issues. He added that there are processes in place to intervene and write-up the youth.

JSC Co-chair Juliano added context from the youth facility RADIUS, noting that since the incident at the YRTC they have seen an increase of unfounded allegations of abuse. Juliano noted that it is an overall out-of-home placement system issue. There was further discussion regarding other issues that have occurred in the past where youth try to exploit the allegation system. Tammy Sassaman discussed how it may affect staffing by discouraging applicants to the YRTC system.

## 9. Probation Update

Amoreena Brady discussed recidivism and detention data.

**Detention Risk Assessment:** A study by the University of Nebraska Omaha on the validation of the detention screening tool is complete, with a webinar scheduled for January 30th to share results with stakeholders.

**Recidivism Rates:** The latest fiscal year report showed a recidivism rate of 18%, a notable decrease from the previous year's 23%.

**Service Gaps:** An environmental scan of rural districts (11 and 12) was conducted with UNK to identify ways to provide services locally so youth do not have to travel to more populated areas of the state

Brady shared links in the chat: <https://nebraskajudicial.gov/sites/default/files/publication-report-files/Q4-2025-Juvenile-Infographics.pdf>, [https://nebraskajudicial.gov/sites/default/files/content-files/Annual-Report-FY-2024\\_Most-current\\_final.pdf](https://nebraskajudicial.gov/sites/default/files/content-files/Annual-Report-FY-2024_Most-current_final.pdf), and <https://www.ncji.org/fmjj/default.asp>.

Deb VanDyke-Ries also shared links in the chat for the January 30<sup>th</sup> webinar:

<https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/382bfe8e-6a51-4441-9f2c-e85f098085e4@af619251-331d-47b2-a22d-f30a84372b98/registration>.

## 10. JSC Workgroup Updates

### a. Access to Services

Julie Smith shared that the group is continuing to be active. She noted there will be a quarterly meeting in Omaha specifically to re-engage with Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) that have been unable to travel to Lincoln to meet during the scheduled times. The work continues to focus on improving access to serve youth in the community.

### b. Racial & Ethnic Disparities

Adam Anderson shared that Chloe Fowler continues to work to reengage and focus the workgroup

### c. Continuum of Care

Tammy Sassaman shared that there was a meeting in November that discussed gaps such as discharge plans, service access, parental follow-through. Tammy Sassaman highlighted specific system gaps, including foster parents becoming "de facto caseworkers" and youth being discharged back into unstable environments without services already in place. She added there was discussion regarding Community Treatment Aides that may be available again.

## 11. NCJJ Subcommittee Updates

### a. Executive Subcommittee

Chair Elaine Menzel shared that the subcommittee met and discussed separation of the groups and planned the agenda for this meeting.

### b. Community Planning Advisory Subcommittee

Erin Wasserburger said the group met September 2nd and discussed creating a quick guide for in-between meetings based on issues that were brought up at the meeting. The group is currently working on the following:

**Grant Solicitations:** The subcommittee is preparing to release grant solicitations in February or March.

**Community Plan Reviews:** Members have been actively reviewing community plans as they are submitted.

**Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) Collaboration:** The group is working with JJI to finalize the "Definitions and Tips" document, which is designed to assist communities in their planning processes.

**c. Juvenile Diversion Subcommittee**

Erin Wasserburger noted that the group met September 22<sup>nd</sup> and reviewed survey results. She shared that the group is working with Dr. Hamilton at UNO (University of Nebraska Omaha) to reevaluate and update the diversion assessment tools, as they have been in use for nearly three years. Additionally, Wasserburger shared the following items:

**Journey.Do Platform:** A contract has been finalized with LifeLabs to launch "Journey.Do," an online diversion platform intended for lower-risk youth.

**Tool Development:** The subcommittee is working on a "Self-Assessment Tool" for diversion programs and is collaborating with the Nebraska Crime Commission on a "Diversion Case Management" tool.

**Diversion Officer Tool:** Development is underway for a tool specifically for diversion officers to assist in managing their caseloads effectively.

**d. Grant Review Subcommittee**

Erin Wasserburger shared that the subcommittee recently met to review grant applications and provided their recommendations to the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). The focus of recent reviews has included Community-Based Aid funding allocations.

**e. Young Adult Subcommittee**

John Turner noted that there are 7 members on the "Nebraska Youth Advisory Board" and the group has been meeting and has elected a chair and vice chair. He noted that the subcommittee continues to meet regularly to discuss and provide a youth perspective on juvenile justice issues.

**12. Title II Update**

**a. Compliance Monitoring and Reporting**

John Turner shared the compliance report and discussed the violations. Erin Wasserburger noted that there have been discussions regarding secure facility determinations by federal government versus state statute and the discrepancy.

**b. Award and Budget Update**

Erin Wasserburger noted that funding for Masey and the Journey.Do diversion platforms is coming out of these funds. Looking to pass funds through but want to target towards status offenders. On track to use FY23 as well as FY21. FY24 will kick off soon. She noted that they are ready for FY25 and FY26 whenever they are available.

**c. RED Plan Update**

John Turner shared that a national consultant, Dr. Bijoux, is reviewing Nebraska's data. While the state has made progress, Dr. Bijoux's initial feedback suggested that "more can be done" to improve equity based on his experience with other states. Dr. Bijoux is currently awaiting additional feedback from NCJJ members. Turner encouraged members to provide feedback. Lastly, Turner shared that in February or March, Dr. Bijoux will be coming to Nebraska.

**13. CJJ Annual Conference**

John Turner shared the conference information will be released soon. He asked members to reach out if they are interested in attending the conference in Washington D.C. He noted that the conference will most likely be held towards the end of May. He provided the link in the chat: <https://juvjustice.org/events/conferences/>

**14. New Business**

Tammy Sassaman shared that the NJJA conference will be May 6 and 7 of 2026. Registration will open in February.

**15. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**16. Upcoming Meeting Planning**

- a. JSC Tentative Proposed Date: April 23, 2026
- b. NCJJ Tentative Proposed Date: May 28, 2026

**17. Adjourn**

Meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM

Respectfully Submitted,  
Adam Anderson

DRAFT