

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Juvenile Services Committee (JSC)**

May 5, 2026
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County
444 Cherry Creek Road, Suite A
Lincoln, NE 68528

1. Call to Order

JSC Co-Chair Nick Juliano called the meeting to order at 9:02.

2. Roll Call

Committee Members Present (11)

Amoreena Brady	Judge Denise Kracl	Patrick Sailors
Sarah Brownell	Laura Lemoine	Vicky Smith
Jennifer Carter	Dennis Marks	Deb VanDyke-Ries
Nick Juliano	Paige McDowell	

Committee Members Absent (4)

Beverly Duran	Tammy Sassaman
Amy Hoffman	Dr. Richard Wiener

Committee Resource Members Present (3)

Shaylee Fortner
Senator Victor Rountree
Julie Smith

Committee Resource Members Absent (1)

Bethany Nelson

A quorum was established for the Juvenile Services Committee

Guests in Attendance (4):

Amy Ambrose	Mark LaBouchardiere
Adam Anderson	Dr. Matt Wittry
Chloe Fowler	

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 Judge Denise Kracl to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Pat Sailors. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (10):

Amoreena Brady
Sarah Brownell
Jennifer Carter
Nick Juliano

Judge Denise Kracl
Dennis Marks
Paige McDowell
Patrick Sailors

Vicky Smith
Deb VanDyke-Ries

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (5):

Beverly Duran
Amy Hoffman

Laura Lemoine
Tammy Sassaman

Dr. Richard Wiener

MOTION CARRIED

**Minutes do not follow the approved agenda*

4. Approval of January 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Paige McDowell to approve the January 22, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Dennis Marks. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (9):

Amoreena Brady
Sarah Brownell
Jennifer Carter

Nick Juliano
Judge Denise Kracl
Dennis Marks

Paige McDowell
Patrick Sailors
Deb VanDyke-Ries

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (1):

Vicky Smith

ABSENT (5):

Beverly Duran
Amy Hoffman

Laura Lemoine
Tammy Sassaman

Dr. Richard Wiener

MOTION CARRIED

5. Policy Analyst and Legislative Update

Child Welfare Policy Analyst Chloe Fowler provided a readout on bills from the short 60-day session, noting that while the legislature focused on a large budget deficit, significant progress was made on juvenile legislation.

- **LB 962 (Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act):** Senator McKinney's priority bill, which the Commission supported. Discussion focused on the bill's language, which appears broad enough to apply to youth in foster care and the child welfare system, rather than just juvenile justice.

- **LB 1155 (Senator Dorn):** Strengthens legislative oversight and increases accountability and service delivery across systems.
- **LB 320 (Senator Sanders):** Establishes human trafficking training requirements for high-traffic locations like hotels and for truck drivers with CDLs.
- **LB 751 (Senator Spivey):** A study on missing black women and children, focusing on investigation and reporting.
- **Interim Studies (LRs):**
 - **LR 467 (McKinney):** Strategies to make Nebraska more attractive to young people to address "brain drain".
 - **LR 466 (McKinney):** Examining causes and impacts of suspension and discipline in elementary schools.
 - **LR 452 (Spivey):** Examining funding sources, service types, and oversight for cross-system services between child welfare and juvenile justice.
 - **LR 380 (Fredrickson):** Examining potential YRTC moves and youth transitions from the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility (NCYF).

6. YRTC Update

Mark LaBouchardiere provided an operational update:

- **Personnel:** Richard Williams (formerly of YRTC-Hastings) has been named Interim Administrator at YRTC-Kearney.
- **Census:** Current population counts are Kearney (61), Hastings (16), Lincoln (14), and Whitehall (32).
- **Facilities:** A new 48-bed building at Kearney is completed but remains unopened due to architectural "punch list" items (such as fixing slopes and corners).
- **Staffing:** Opening the new 48-bed building would require hiring 25–28 additional staff, which presents budgetary and job security challenges if future facility moves are decided.

The committee held a candid discussion on why reentry is difficult:

- **Proximity:** Moving youth from Kearney to a facility closer to Omaha (where the majority of the population originates) would improve reentry by placing youth closer to families, schools, and community therapists.
- **Placement Denials:** Members expressed frustration that in-state placements often "cherry-pick" youth, denying those with complex needs like aggressive behaviors, suicidal ideation, or medical conditions such as sickle cell disease or seizures.
- **Discharge Irony:** It was noted that youth are frequently discharged from placements for the exact "high-risk" behaviors that led to their referral.

7. Probation Update

Amoreena Brady shared two handouts regarding the recent work of Probation. She highlighted several reports now available online:

- **District 11 & 12 Environmental Scan:** Brady reported that a comprehensive scan was recently completed by the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). This study focused on the western panhandle of the state to identify specific service gaps and community needs within those judicial districts.
- **Detention Rate Study:** A study conducted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) Fiscal Office examined current detention rates and costs. The data from this report is being utilized by detention centers to advocate for higher legislative appropriations to cover rising operational expenses.
- **Intake Assessment Validation:** Following a study with UNO, it was recommended that the current juvenile intake assessment tool be recalibrated to improve external confidence in its accuracy and reliability.

- **Federal Grant Submission:** On May 1, 2026, a grant was submitted to the Casey Foundation to secure funding for the recalibration and validation of the intake assessment tool.
- **OJS Training for Judges:** Mark LaBouchardiere noted that the Office of Juvenile Services (OJS) has been invited by the Judicial Branch Education group to conduct two separate lunch-hour trainings for judges on May 26th and May 28th. These sessions will cover:
 - **YRTC Programming:** A brief on treatment, science, and education protocols at the facilities.
 - **Investigations:** How the YRTC conducts internal investigations and collaborates with the Nebraska State Patrol (NSP) on allegations of misconduct or serious injury.
 - **Court Notifications:** The technical process of how the court is notified of incidents or changes in youth status.

Additionally, Brady shared the impact of LB 530 and the intakes of 11 and 12-year-olds. She also clarified that law enforcement will have additional training requirements. She added that intakes of the 11 and 12-year-olds are being reviewed by the Intake Committee.

Julie Smith shared that there are 78 youth in out-of-state treatment facilities. She also shared some specific details about the out-of-state treatment facilities. Members discussed placement delays and the utilization of out-of-state treatment facilities. Brady clarified that bordering states are often appropriate locations for geographic considerations. Judge Kracl discussed the financial implications of having a youth get appropriate services early on.

8. Annual Report

Chloe Fowler shared a timeline for drafting reports, noting that report drafting is currently underway, and a draft will be available by the next meeting.

9. JSC Workgroup Updates

a. Access to Services

Julie Smith provided a detailed history and current status report for this workgroup:

- **Workgroup Origin and Scope:** Originally formed in July 2022 as a six-month project, the group has continued to meet almost every month due to the high level of passion and collaboration among its members, which include MCOs, providers, Dr. Wittry, and HHS.
- **Systemic Barriers:** The group identified six overarching systemic barriers to service access. While the workgroup acknowledges they do not have the direct capacity to change these large-scale systems, they remain committed to "raising up" these issues to leadership.
- **Congregate Care Review:** Over the past 18 months, the group has been reviewing a U.S. Senate report regarding the harms of congregate care (titled *Taxpayer-Funded Abuse and Neglect of Children*). The group used this report as a catalyst to rethink Nebraska's service model.
- **New Service Definition:** The workgroup is proposing a new "service definition" designed to fill the current gap between outpatient care (which is often not enough) and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (which are often inaccessible due to waitlists).
 - **Goal:** To provide high-intensity, community-integrated treatment that allows youth to remain with their families while receiving the level of care they need.
 - **Status:** The group has developed the definition and is now seeking expenditure data to determine the potential costs and outcomes.

A motion was made by Jennifer Carter to allow the Juvenile Services Committee to request Medicaid expenditure data through the Commission Policy Analyst. The motion was seconded by Pat Sailors. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (11):

Amoreena Brady

Sarah Brownell

Jennifer Carter

Nick Juliano
Judge Denise Kracl
Laura Lemoine

Dennis Marks
Paige McDowell
Patrick Sailors

Vicky Smith
Deb VanDyke-Ries

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (4):

Beverly Duran
Amy Hoffman

Tammy Sassaman
Dr. Richard Wiener

MOTION CARRIED

b. Racial & Ethnic Disparities

Chloe Fowler noted that this group is currently being paused to work on next steps.

c. Continuum of Care

Chloe Fowler shared that the workgroup is working on a transfer document for placements. Fowler provided specifics regarding the transfer document. Fowler noted that she has created a compliance document for the workgroup to review.

10. New Business

Chloe Fowler announced her departure from the Commission in mid-June. Chloe thanked the committee for the opportunities she was given to learn and grow in her role. She noted that she appreciated the "opportunities to learn and to fail and to get back up and keep trying". Co-chair Nick Juliano officially thanked her for her service, stating, "Thank you for the time you spent with us and the commission. Good luck".

11. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

12. Upcoming Meeting Planning

a. July 23, 2026, Virtual

13. Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Anderson