Nebraska Children's Commission Meeting
May 12, 2026
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Carol Joy Holling
27416 Ranch Road
Ashland, NE 68003

1. Call to Order

Kari Rumbaugh welcomed everyone and formally called the meeting to order at **11:13 AM**. She asked Administrative Programs Officer Adam Anderson to call roll.

Commission Members Present (6)

Angel Geller
Richard Hasty
Sara Hoyle
Felicia Nelsen
Susan Thomas
LaShawn Young

Commission Members Absent (5)

Jarren Breeling
Abigail Fox
Ron Giesselmann
Melissa Nilges
Lana Temple-Plotz

Commission Ex-Officio Members Present (8)

Proxy for Dr. Bish, Camas Holder
Lane Carr
Proxy for Jennifer Carter, Meghan Svik
Monika Gross
Senator Glen Meyer
Senator Victor Rountree
Kari Rumbaugh
Judge Amy Schuchman
Deb VanDyke-Ries

Commission Ex-Officio Members Absent (3)

Senator Christy Armendariz
Thomas Janousek
Senator Glen Meyer

Quorum Note: Roll call was taken through introductions. It was noted that action items were delayed at the start of the morning due to a lack of quorum; however, a quorum was successfully established prior to official votes.

Guests in Attendance (9)

Payne Ackerman, Strengthening Families Act Committee
Adam Anderson, Nebraska Children's Commission
Blair Bagley, Bagley Strategies
Chloe Fowler, Nebraska Children's Commission
Theresa Goley, FCRRC Co-Chair
Felipe Longoria-Shinn, Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee
Jackie Meyer, FCRRC
Megan Svik, Office of Inspector General
Ivy Svoboda, Nebraska Child Advocacy Centers

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 Meetings Calendar and Nebraska Children's Commission websites 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 Children's Commission Website.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Due to the delayed quorum, an amendment to the agenda order was requested. Items 8 and 9 from the agenda were moved up to be addressed first, after which the Commission returned to the original order of the agenda.

It was moved by Susan Thomas and seconded by Richard Hasty to approve the agenda, with changes as discussed. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (5):
Richard Hasty
Sara Hoyle
Felicia Nelsen
Susan Thomas
LaShawn Young

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (1):
Angel Geller

ABSENT (5):
Jarren Breeling
Abigail Fox
Ron Giesselmann
Melissa Nilges
Lana Temple-Plotz

MOTION CARRIED

Note that the order of items in the minutes will not be reflective of the original agenda.

3. Chair Update

Adam Anderson announced that Chair Melissa Nance is no longer with CEDARS and has subsequently stepped down from the Children's Commission to step away from child welfare for the near future.

Key Discussion Points:

- The Commission currently has **three member vacancies**.
- The Governor's office is tracking four active applications to fill these open positions.
- Vice Chair Ron Giesselmann is tracking to potentially step into the Chair position. If he assumes the Chair role, the Commission will subsequently need to elect or select a new Vice Chair.
- Members were reminded of historical practices where the Executive Committee and Policy Analyst collaborated with the Governor's office to review applicant lists and offer candidate feedback. Members were urged to recruit qualified individuals to apply, noting that positions dedicated to individuals with lived experience are currently fully filled.

4. Policy Analyst Update

Policy Analyst Chloe Fowler shared that she has accepted a position outside the Children's Commission and her final day will be **June 12, 2026**. She submitted her formal notice on May 11, 2026. She has already begun drafting annual reports to ensure a seamless transition for her successor. The job description will be circulated publicly via social media and email links once posted.

Legislative Session Highlights:

- The Legislative Workgroup was successfully reactivated for this session.
- The Commission tracked **75 bills** relevant to social welfare, **7** of which had direct relevance to the Commission's active operations.
- **LB 596 (Government Committee):** Prioritized and passed, making it operationally easier for state bodies to coordinate and hold joint public meetings.
- **Health and Human Services Committee Bill:** Clarified and expanded legal statutory definitions regarding the tribal age of majority.

- **Legislative Success:** The Commission successfully advocated for the defeat of "Section 1" of a proposed bill that would have statutorily eliminated the Alternative Response Committee.

5. Approval of the Consent Agenda

a. February 10, 2026 Meeting Minutes
b. Member Nomination Report

It was moved by Sarah Hoyle and seconded by LaShawn Young to approve the consent agenda items as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (6):

Angel Geller	Sara Hoyle	Susan Thomas
Richard Hasty	Felicia Nelsen	LaShawn Young

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAIN (0):

ABSENT (5):

Jarren Breeling	Melissa Nilges
Abigail Fox	Lana Temple-Plotz
Ron Giesselmann	

MOTION CARRIED

6. Commission Membership & Vacancies

(Dealt with comprehensively during the Chair Update section regarding active applications and recruitment strategy).

7. Committee Update

a. Alternative Response Committee
   AR Co-Chair Monika Gross reported that the committee successfully survived a statutory elimination threat during the legislative session via targeted advocacy and testimony.
   - **Next Meeting:** Scheduled for **June 5, 2026**. The committee is actively looking for new members to replace departed individuals; applications should go through Adam Anderson.
   - **Statutory Scope:** The AR committee remains charged with reviewing DHHS screening/hotline procedures, traditional vs. alternative responses to abuse/neglect reports, and ongoing open non-court in-home cases.
   - **Restructuring:** The committee previously operated three workgroups: Oversight, Legal Services (pre-petition parent/child rights), and Workforce. Legal Services has completed its core charge, and the Workforce group will likely transition directly to the full Commission. The committee will restructure and form 1–2 new workgroups to align with shifting agency landscapes.
   - **DHHS Warm Line Coordination:** Discussion turned to the rollout of the DHHS "warm line" and mandatory reporter training. It was clarified that families routed to the warm line do *not* screen into the CPS hotline threshold and follow a preventative community connection path, distinguishing them strictly from official Alternative Response families.

b. Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee
   Chair Richard Hasty reported steady membership growth and excellent stakeholder dialogue over the past 12 months. **Statutory Sunsetting:** Attention was drawn to the statutory sunsetting on **June 30, 2026**. It was emphasized that while the statutory committees sunset, their core duties and responsibilities are explicitly absorbed by the full Children's Commission.

- **Operational Formality Rules:** The committee discussed whether maintaining strict Open Meetings Act and quorum guidelines provides necessary credibility, or if easing certain procedural formalities would create a more comfortable environment for young adults with lived experience to participate. It was noted that probation youth are now entering eligibility pools.
- **Peer Connections Workgroup:** Co-Chairs Felipe Longoria-Shinn and Dylan Graeve (a young adult with lived experience) completed a comprehensive description of three finalized data-driven recommendations submitted for the annual report:
    1. **Data Sharing Agreements:** Establish better data bridges between B2i and auxiliary educational/financial literacy programs to track utilization and longitudinal outcomes.
    2. **Expectation Continuity:** Require Independence Coordinators (ICs) to systematically review program expectations with youth every 6 months to bypass early information overwhelm and build trust.
    3. **Peer Engagement:** Mitigate program isolation by introducing peer-to-peer leadership and connection opportunities.

c. Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee

Co-Chairs Felicia Nelsen and Theresa Goley detailed the extensive testing phase of the newly developed **Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility (NCR) Tool**, which aims to replace the outdated 2014 iteration.

- **The New Tool Model:** Unlike the old text-heavy tool, the updated NCR utilizes a highly user-friendly checkbox structure that distinctly separates and scores the specific clinical needs of the youth and the corresponding response capabilities of the foster parent (e.g., scoring a nurse foster parent higher for managing complex medical needs).
- **Pilot Testing Data:** A blind comparison study evaluated **50 youth cases** across multiple Nebraska regions, matching independent assessments completed by case managers against those by private agency providers. The results demonstrated strong, objective reliability:
    - **74%** of youth remained at their exact current care level.
    - **12%** scored one level lower; **2%** scored two levels lower.
    - **12%** scored one level higher.
    - In **52%** of cases, the case manager independently scored the child higher than the private provider did, dispelling administrative worries of provider-driven rate inflation.
- **Next Steps:** The final proposal was sent to Lana (DHHS) on **April 24, 2026**. The committee is waiting for leadership approval (via Director Bish and Kathleen Stoltz) before exhausting hours creating statewide training modules and coding the tool into the N-FOCUS state computer database.
- **Rate Study Reactivation:** The FCRRC plans to officially reconvene next year to conduct a comprehensive rate study and propose a foster care rate increase, emphasizing that current baseline rates have been frozen for two years and no longer match the escalating cost of living or basic needs of children.

d. Juvenile Services Committee

JSC Co-Chair Deb VanDyke-Ries presented a multi-layered update on systems-level juvenile justice interventions.

- **Access to Services Workgroup:** Led by Julie Smith (Probation), this group is addressing critical shortages in Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) beds and youth tracking into extended detention stays. The group identified a critical service gap sitting between outpatient mental health treatment and PRTF care.
- **Medicaid Data Motion:** The JSC officially voted to approve Chloe Fowler making a formal request to Medicaid to allow Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to release expenditure data to the subcommittee. This will help the state understand what it pays for residential psychiatric services and see if funds can be reallocated to localized community care.
- **Out-of-State Placement Trends:** It was reported that nearly **50% of Nebraska juvenile justice youth** requiring PRTF care are currently placed out of state (such as the Rite of Passage facility) due to severe in-state capacity limits, requiring complex Interstate Compact coordination.
- **Continuum of Care Workgroup:** After spending a year touring state detention facilities and YRTCs, the committee identified three foundational systemic barriers:
    1. *Discharge Gaps:* Caseworker overload and lack of parental follow-through on therapeutic care post-release.
    2. *Service Gaps:* Severe geographic discrepancies in rural areas and extreme provider shortages.
    3. *Communication Failures:* Facilities intentionally withholding behavior histories to secure placements, lack of notification on safety risks, and severe medication transition gaps where youth go days without prescriptions during transfers.
    4. Tangible Interventions: The workgroup is designing a half-page "Transfer of History Snapshot" form to guarantee that medication profiles, de-escalation triggers, and strengths travel instantly with a youth.

Additionally, the committee is advocating for a resurgence of bachelor's-level Community Treatment Aids (CTAs) to act as in-home support alongside therapists during a youth's transition home.

e. Strengthening Families Act Committee

Payne Ackerman reported on the committee's mid-April session focused heavily on structural realignment.

- **Workgroup Tracking:** The committee will sustain its Normalcy, Trafficking, and Another Plan for Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)/Aftercare workgroups. Payne will personally oversee the revamping of the APPLA/Aftercare documentation process.
- **Federal Policy Integration:** The committee is tracking **HR 976 (Protecting America's Children by Strengthening Families Act)**, signed into federal law in January 2026. The act targets caregiver services, economic/housing stability, and poverty prevention. The SFA is looking into starting a brand-new subcommittee or partnering with the JSC to merge these directives into a unified "One Nebraska" group focused on marginalized youth populations.
- **Youth Engagement Restructuring:** Due to standard school hours making weekday committee attendance nearly impossible for youth, the committee is coordinating with Crystal Aldmeyer to conduct specialized focus groups and outreach on weekends and after-school hours.

8. Strategic Priority Session

Following a brief announcement that lunch would be hosted just up the sidewalk at noon, the Commission broke for lunch and transitioned into the afternoon strategic work session.

Facilitator Blair Bagley led the Commission through an interactive "Diagnostic Gallery Walk" session. Using a visual map with the Nebraska Children's Commission positioned at the center, groups used colored sticky notes to plot operational structures.

- **Yellow sticky notes** were utilized to explicitly chart areas of "traction" where communication pipelines are working efficiently.
- **Pink sticky notes** were placed to designate structural "friction" or systemic breakdowns across committees.

The diagnostic data collection session concluded promptly at **2:30 PM**, providing a framework for upcoming strategic plan revisions.

Following that exercise, the Commission continued its work until the scheduled 4:00 PM conclusion time, utilizing the remaining time to synthesize the data, discuss the findings, and plan the next steps for the strategic plan revisions. Discussion during this time included the following highlights:

1. Group Structure & Overlap (The "Friction" Points)

- **The "One Nebraska" Vision:** A major point of discussion was the lack of communication and alignment between the various statutory committees. Members noted that committees often operate in "silos," working on overlapping issues (like workforce or rural service gaps) without realizing what other groups are doing.
- **Committee Restructuring:** There was a strong push to structurally align the committees so they feed directly into the Commission's broader goals rather than drifting in separate directions. The phrase "One Nebraska" was emphasized as a guiding principle to unify the directives of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee, the Juvenile Services Committee (JSC), and the Alternative Response (AR) Committee.

2. Concrete Priorities for the Strategic Plan

- **Workforce Stability:** The Commission identified the high turnover and heavy caseloads of Children and Family Services Specialists as a systemic crisis that undercuts all other child welfare initiatives. Stabilizing the workforce was solidified as a top strategic priority.
- **Rural Service Disparities:** The synthesis highlighted severe geographic gaps in behavioral and mental health services. The Commission agreed that future strategic initiatives must focus heavily on building out rural community care resources to prevent out-of-home and out-of-state placements.

- **Elevating Lived Experience:** Members discussed how to better integrate and support youth and family members with lived experience within the strict confines of the Open Meetings Act. The consensus was to find a balance that lowers procedural barriers for youth participation while maintaining the Commission's statutory credibility.

3. Next Steps & Timeline

- The themes and sticky-note data captured by Blair Bagley during the session will be compiled into a formalized framework.
- This framework will be used to draft the updated **Strategic Plan**, which will be circulated to members for review ahead of the next scheduled meeting on **August 11, 2026**.

9. Upcoming Meeting Planning

a. August 11, 2026, Virtual, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

10. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Anderson