

Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee

November 13, 2025

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Virtual

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Nebraska State Office Building
Lower Level Sarpy Conference Room
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Co-Chair, Ron Giesselmann, called the meeting of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee to order at 10:35 AM, and asked Adam Anderson to call roll.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Committee Members present (8):

Payne Ackerman
Crystal Aldmeyer
Stephanie Bizzarri

Deanna Brakhage
Proxy for Misty Flowers,
Deborah Dancer

Ron Giesselmann
Bailey Perry
Fannye Placke

Committee Members absent (2):

Amy Ambrose

Denisha Seals

Ex-Officio Members present (1):

Monika Gross

Ex-Officio Members absent (2):

Theresa Cusic
Jeremy Behrends

A quorum was established.

Guests In Attendance (4):

Adam Anderson
Chloe Fowler
Laura Maddox

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

It was moved by Stephanie Bizzarri and seconded by Ron Giesselmann to approve the agenda as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (7):

Payne Ackerman
Crystal Aldmeyer
Stephanie Bizzarri

Deanna Brakhage
Ron Giesselmann
Bailey Perry

Fannye Placke

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (3):

Amy Ambrose

Misty Flowers

Denisha Seals

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Stephanie Bizzarri to approve the January 21, 2025 minutes with correction to the spelling of Monika Gross in the roll call. The motion was seconded by Payne Ackerman. There was no further discussion. Roll call vote as follows:

FOR (8):

Payne Ackerman
Crystal Aldmeyer
Stephanie Bizzarri

Deanna Brakhage
Proxy for Misty Flowers,
Deborah Dancer

Ron Giesselmann
Bailey Perry
Fannye Placke

AGAINST (0):

ABSTAINED (0):

ABSENT (2):

Amy Ambrose

Denisha Seals

MOTION CARRIED

V. Co-Chair Report

Co-Chair Giesselmann stated that as the committee is regrouping they are in the process of figuring out the best way to proceed.

VI. Membership Update

Adam Anderson shared updates on membership:

- New Members: Amy Ambrose was added since the last meeting, and Fannye Placke was at the last January meeting.
- Potential Changes: A conversation is needed to determine if Deborah Dancer, if she joins, will take over for Misty Flowers, or if Misty Flowers will step down.
- Non-Voting Members: Adam Anderson will review the list of non-voting members, noting Monica is listed as an "ex-officio".

- Social Media/Contractor: The Commission is continuing social media marketing, and new wording/contact ideas were developed to set expectations for subcommittee and work group members, as initial follow-up on interest forms was lacking.
- Commission Meeting: The Commission meeting will be held next Tuesday (November 18, 2025) to approve members who have applied since the last meeting.

VII. Legislative Update

Policy Analyst, Chloe Fowler shared the following updates:

- Social Network Analysis (SNA) Research: Fowler has been working on SNA research based on data collected over the summer.
 - SNA Details: The project looks at Nebraska Unicameral legislators based on their involvement (voting, introduction, co-sponsorship) of child welfare-related bills from the 2025 session. Visualizations, spreadsheets with centrality breakdowns, and a document listing bills (introducer, co-signers, status) exist. This tool will be used for policy strategy to identify "coalition builders" and individuals with influence, particularly due to the large budget shortfall.
- HR 976 - Supporting America's Children and Families Act: There was discussion about this federal act (passed in 2024), which provides funding to states for child welfare services, including expanding prevention, legal representation, and family services. The funding streams include Title IV-E. It was noted that Nebraska submitted a Child and Family Services Plan for 2025-2029.
- Interim Studies/Hearings: Fowler has been involved with: a truancy study (report to the Education Committee) ; interim hearings on affordable/accessible housing and neighborhood-level investments ; and a meeting with Senator Spivey to discuss the Children's Commission.
- Annual Hearing: The annual hearing with the Health and Human Services Committee is scheduled for December 5th at 9:30 AM, where the Commission is allotted three minutes to speak. Fowler emphasized the importance of high attendance to combat a perceived "lack of institutional knowledge" about the Commission among legislative appointments. An outdated one-pager is being updated by the marketing contractor.
- Legislative Session Outlook: The 60-day session starts January 7th. It was reported that anything requiring funding is unlikely to get far, and the Speaker is expected to push votes on carryover bills early in the session, which will take up significant time. LB 13 (Michaela Cavanaugh's priority bill for a DHHS childcare plan amendment) is currently stuck on Select File.

VIII. Trafficking Summit

Co-Chair Ron Giesselmann and Policy Analyst Chloe Fowler shared updates from their attendance at the Trafficking summit on September 16, 2025:

- Giesselmann was impressed by the presentation on trafficking in Nebraska. He feels that trafficking should be a top priority for this Committee. Fowler shared that the Center for Missing and Exploited Children provided a presentation that was very informative.
- Giesselmann shared that despite Nebraska's size it has all the trafficking problems facing more populous states. He learned that it is often subcontractors that engage in labor trafficking, where the larger companies can deny. He noted the prevalence of trafficking in truck stops, and an overall trend of trafficking among vulnerable children in homes with step-parents and significant others living in the same home. Giesselmann shared that there are publicity efforts to combat certain avenues for trafficking. He answered that the presentation did not focus on foster youth, but anecdotally noted that foster youth experience some sort of personal violations.

- Fowler shared that instead of particular groups of youth at risk, there are a number of vulnerabilities, such as immigration status, social support, language barriers, etc. Fowler will share her notes from the trafficking summit.
- Labor Trafficking Study: The committee discussed a labor trafficking study, noting specific vulnerabilities: immigration status, lack of social support, language barriers (with employer-provided translators being a risk), and a history of trauma/abuse. The study identified a lack of coordination among state stakeholders and recommended a Center on Labor Trafficking to organize training, response models, and service connection points. - Nebraska's Status: Nebraska is considered a source, transit, and destination state for trafficking due to its central location and agricultural industry.

IX. Subcommittee Discussion

The Committee discussed the following Subcommittee updates:

- Normalcy Reports Update: Chloe Fowler met with DHHS staff (Becca Saxton) regarding normalcy reports and plans. The submission timeline was changed from September 1st to September 30th. –
 - Form Changes: The report forms were changed to remove overlap/repetition and to remove identifying information of individuals and children.
 - Oversight and Concern: There is a consensus that the Normalcy work group should operate in an oversight capacity and review reports before submission. Members expressed strong concern that many institutions submit the exact same boilerplate reports year after year, preventing actual change. - Misinterpretation of Normalcy: Subcommittee member Channa Walz shared a concern that institutions often confuse children's rights (like going to the doctor or school) with actual normalcy (like participating in extracurriculars or going to homecoming), suggesting they do not understand the concept in a group home setting.
 - Action/Enforcement: It was suggested that the most effective way to enforce normalcy is through licensing and contracts (i.e., monetary penalties). The reports should be summarized and provided to licensing for enforcement. –
 - Channa Walz Case Example: Ms. Walz shared a personal case regarding three kids in foster care. DHHS is preventing a guardianship with a family willing to take them at a higher level of care (1:1 overnight staffing) unless the family agrees to take the \$23/day stipend, an amount insufficient for the children's needs. She stated this situation directly impacts the children's ability to have a normal life. Recruitment: There was a discussion about Ms. Walz joining the Normalcy Subcommittee as an experienced parent in the system.
- APPLA: Payne Ackerman will discuss a revised Subcommittee with Crystal Aldmeyer.
- Family Support: Co-Chairs Ackerman and Giesselmann will discuss moving forward with the Subcommittee. Ackerman will propose a mission statement for the subcommittee.
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X. One Nebraska Workgroup Discussion

Chloe Fowler discussed the past work starting the One Nebraska Workgroup. Co-Chair Ackerman discussed the need for a specific workgroup regarding equity and inclusion and he would like to lead the work. He noted that the JSC R/ED workgroup was removing specific priorities from the proposed workgroup.

Co-Chair Ackerman offered to attend and present information regarding the One Nebraska Workgroup

XI. New Business

There was no new business.

XII. Upcoming Meetings:

- a. Adam Anderson will poll the group for the next meeting date.

XIII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:16 PM

DRAFT