



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana
Wednesday, December 7, 2022
Indiana State Library, History Reference Room

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Dr. Kris Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, Indiana State Department of Health
- Senator Jean Breaux
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, joined via Zoom (non-voting member for this meeting)
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Kory George, Chief Probation Officer, Wayne County Probation Department
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Hon. Loretta Rush, Chief Justice of Indiana
- Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Stephaney Knight, Youth Commission Member
- Dejana Rodriguez, Youth Commission Member

1. Welcome

Chief Justice Rush called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and shared compliments for the Commission in reaching its 10th year. Julie Whitman suggested starting with agenda items that did not require action while awaiting enough members to reach a quorum.

2. Strategic Priority: Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Susan Elsworth

Presentation: [Needs assessment](#) findings for children and youth with FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder)

The presentation can be found on slides 16-31 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Susan introduced herself and her experience working with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Starting the presentation, she first explained the funding, completion, and distribution methods of the [report](#), indicating 8 main findings to share. The first point

described the difficulty of including those with lived experience in electronic surveys, suggesting the incorporation of personal relationships to capture input. The second point showed that the survey suggests improved awareness about healthy behaviors when pregnant, however, some do not believe certain types of alcohol are harmful. The third point similarly showed an increase in alcohol consumption 3 months before pregnancy, reiterating the need for more alcohol education. The fourth and fifth points showed confusion about the criteria to define FASD and how to use screening tools, which can be addressed by educating providers. The next point showed a lack of awareness of the Indiana Birth Defects and Problems Registry (IBDPR) by non-medical providers. The seventh and eighth points involved how to reach target audiences and continuing research and resource sharing, proposing establishing a FASD task force to address all these issues listed. Susan closed by sharing some ratio statistics about the prevalence of drinking while pregnant. She shared that the FASD subcommittee will be finalizing its recommendations soon and opened herself to questions.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush asked Susan if the FASD subcommittee will continue to meet, to which Susan shared that they are scheduled to meet until the recommendations are made. Julie Whitman shared the option for the Commission to include the proposed FASD task force in the next strategic plan. Chief Justice Rush shared that she encountered youth with FASD when she was on the bench, and Dr. Box shared pricing and logistical challenges to FASD screening, reiterating the need for increasing awareness. Chief Justice Rush asked Dr. Box if children with FASD experience challenges, to which Dr. Box shared that it manifests in different ways. Chief Justice Rush emphasized that this issue is not going away and shared support for the Commission to help find a place for this issue to be addressed. Dr. Box shared some collaboratives that currently exist, and Susan Elsworth emphasized the need for the issue to be addressed specifically. Susan shared an account of her son's experience with FASD, stressing the need for more support.

3. Strategic Priority: Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth

Hon. Ryan King, Ripley Circuit Court, and Waylon James, DCS (Department of Child Services)

Presentation: Juvenile competency legislation taking effect December 31, 2022

The presentation can be found on slides 32-45 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Hon. Ryan King introduced himself and the topic of the new juvenile competency law. He explained competency as a person's ability to understand the proceedings against them and assist their attorney. Judge King listed those on the task force and those who have assisted the work group, thanking all who were involved. He listed the 3 items the group has worked on, including an evaluation report, timeline flow-chart, and order forms. Next, he explained the two parts of the statute, which include evaluation and attainment. He showed the requirements to be an evaluator, which include being a psychologist or psychiatrist with expertise in juvenile competency. He outlined the contents of the evaluation, which include the details of the juvenile, purpose for evaluation, list of information and relevant history, mental status tests, the expert's analysis, and final competency determination. To describe the second work item, the timeline flow-chart, Judge King highlighted the language's emphasis on urgency. The order forms are being finalized to include appointing experts, providing documents, finding competent/incompetent, and those who may attain competency. Judge King also outlined the order forms for dismissal and referral to other service entities. He also shared some personal considerations about when refiling might occur and what the timing of those cases would be.

Waylon James introduced himself and his topic of competency attainment services. He shared the goals, which include due process, return to competency when possible, and individualized service to fit unique needs statewide. He outlined the requirements of the curriculum, including the support services, notification requirements, and the two currently contracted providers.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush commented that judges have discretionary authority on low-level cases, to which Judge King agreed, saying that the referral system should hopefully keep the unnecessary ones out of the system.

4. Strategic Priority: Educational Outcomes

Jarod Wilson, Foster Success

Presentation: Increasing Postsecondary success for vulnerable youth

The presentation can be found on slides 3-15 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Jarod introduced himself and described the work and goals of Foster Success. He briefly described the purpose and timeline of the 21st Century Scholar program, which aids low-income youth with college tuition. He shared his goal to increase the number of scholarship recipients, given the gap between eligibility and actual enrollment. He showed data outlining higher enrollment rates, GPAs, and completion rates for low-income students enrolled with the program compared to their non-enrolled peers. Jarod explained the 2018 change that allowed the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) and the Department of Child Service (DCS) to share data that would automatically enroll foster youth into the program. He outlined the task force's request, which is for the Commission to approve automatically enrolling students who are part of the free and reduced lunch program into the 21st Century Scholars program.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush commented that the number of youth eligible for this enrollment is likely large. Jarod agreed and shared that the investment return is 10 times over. John Hammond asked how many foster youths are currently enrolled, but Jarod did not have those numbers with him.

Action: Dr. Box motioned, and Representative Summers seconded to approve the [recommendation](#) to implement automatic enrollment in the 21st Century Scholars program. This passed unanimously 8-0.

5. Strategic Priority: Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth

JauNae Hanger, Children's Policy and Law Initiative, and Sandy Runkle, Prevent Child Abuse Indiana

Presentation: The Developmental Case for a Delinquency Age Floor

The presentation can be found on slides 54-71 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). JauNae began by thanking those on the Juvenile Justice and Cross-System Youth task force and others who contributed. She mentioned that the task force is not making a formal recommendation yet. Sandy began by outlining aspects of child brain development and its relationship with trauma. She also mentioned that early system involvement increases the chances of future system involvement. Sandy shared statistics that showed mental health struggles, disability rates, and experienced trauma of youth in the juvenile justice system. JauNae showed disparities by race in the juvenile justice and school discipline systems. She also showed decreased education and employment rates for those system-involved youth, regardless of age. She outlined research trends that indicate support for an age-minimum around 12/13/14, and the different states' subsequent implementation. JauNae then showed the type of offenses by those 12 and under, with the majority being status and misdemeanors. She transitioned to show the barriers and gaps in resources, particularly for school support professionals, comparing Indiana's student-staff ratio versus the recommended ratio. The 4 main questions involved what the minimum age should be, how to use existing resources, how to increase support, and how to monitor outcomes. For next steps, JauNae suggested the Commission to continue researching this topic and find a consensus, emphasize and improve student services, and encourage resource mapping. JauNae provided information for a relevant online seminar and links to contact information.

Discussion: Chief Justice Rush mentioned that the absence of a minimum age was an issue that was brought up frequently statewide by judges. John Hammond asked if the other state models mentioned delineate by type of offense for the relevant age, to which JauNae answered that each state's model is different. Chief Justice Rush commented that the 988 crisis line should be promoted to help with this issue and asked if the legislature has looked at this topic, to which JauNae shared that she has been contacting legislators. Representative Summers and Chief Justice Rush asked if JauNae and Sandy had any model legislation prepared. JauNae mentioned that there is no consensus because of juvenile court judges' hesitation because of rare cases. Dr. Box complimented the presentation and asked where the school staff ratio data came from, to which JauNae replied that an

assessment was done by the Department of Education. Dr. Box also mentioned data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and how it might relate to this topic. Chief Justice Rush asked Kory George if the Youth Justice Oversight Committee could look at this topic, to which Kory answered that his group is looking specifically at screening. Julie Whitman explained that the Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force had previously addressed this topic but only had consensus for a minimum age for detention, not for delinquency jurisdiction. DeJuna Rodriguez asked if there are any funds aimed towards extra-curricular activities for youth, mentioning seeing decreases in youth getting in trouble when they had healthy activities. JauNae agreed that activities that build healthy relationships and outlets are important but did not know details of current funding.

6. Executive Director Updates

Julie Whitman

Strategic Planning and Implementation Updates

The presentation can be found on slides 72-78 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Julie shared that strategic planning is underway and that she is taking input for what strategic goals or objectives should be added. She also shared goals of increasing youth and family voice and establishing better state-local communication. Transitioning to implementation updates, Julie referenced previous recommendations regarding professional licensing barriers. She mentioned an expected steady increase in number of licensed health professionals as outlined in the [Health Workforce Report](#). She also referenced the Trauma/Adversity definition document and how she provided it to the Department of Health's work on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Julie then referenced the recent [recommendations on juvenile violence prevention](#) and how she was able to share them with the Marion County Commission on Youth. She next showed the list of future meeting dates and informed that those meetings would take place at Government Center South. Julie told the Commission and all guests they are welcome to attend the reception immediately after the meeting.

Discussion: Dr. Box shared the Department of Health's recent success recruiting youth and offered to explore a relationship with the Commission. Julie shared that the Commission is considering different structures for youth advisory groups. Chief Justice Rush asked about stipends, to which Julie shared that the Commission already does and will continue to compensate youth and families. Chief Justice Rush complimented Julie's efforts as she is moving on from the Commission soon.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, February 15, 2022, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room A, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.