



# Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

## Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana  
Wednesday, June 21, 2023  
Indiana Government Center South

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Dr. Lindsay Weaver, 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)
- Dana Kenworthy, Court of Appeals of Indiana
- Dr. Maria Finnell (non-voting member), (Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary), Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Eric Miller, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Stephaney Knight, Youth Commission Member
- Dejana Rodriguez, Youth Commission Member

### 1. Welcome

Senator Donato called the meeting to order at 10:00am and welcomed guests. She also announced the Commission's two new members, Eric Miller, who was not present, and Dr. Weaver. Dr. Weaver introduced herself as the new State Health Commissioner, sharing her background as a physician, Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health, and mother to five daughters.

### 2. Consent Agenda

**Action:** To approve [minutes from the April meeting](#) was approved unanimously 14-0.

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

## **Justice Steven David**

### **Update on the Youth Justice Oversight Committee**

Justice David began by sharing excitement that Commission members will be seeing the Youth Justice Oversight Committee (YJOC) report soon, meeting the deadline of the end of June 2023 as outlined in HEA1359. He shared that the Committee addressed 72 recommendations from the various workgroups, and at its last meeting, all of them were passed. He praised the workgroups and their hundreds of hours of effort in completing their tasks, highlighting the helpful feedback from the youth and family advisory group. Justice David admitted prior reluctance or hesitation to include this group out of concern that the workgroups might not be equipped to correctly convey ideas or hear from those with lived experience, but he applauded all involved for the successful collaboration. He also thanked Kia Wright for training the young contributors from this group, explaining that they were well prepared. Next, Justice David shared that the Youth Justice Oversight Committee will continue, and the Indiana Office of Court Services will help maintain the group. He said that the group's work should be an example of how to bolster some of the great work that is already being done. He mentioned they did not create a universal tool that applies to every department in every county and solves all the problems, but rather a roadmap that all the contributors, including the Commission, need to be invested in and engaged to help. He shared the report will include a cover letter from himself and an executive summary that summarizes the longer list of reports. He also mentioned that Senator Crider and Representative McNamara joined their last meeting to thank all involved. He reflected on his time as a juvenile judge and his various roles working for kids, mentioning that though children make up a fraction of the population, they make up 100 percent of the future. Justice David thanked Mark Fairchild and everyone who contributed and then opened himself to questions.

#### **4. 2023 State of the Child**

##### **Indiana Youth Institute (IYI)**

##### **Data Presentation with Strategic Plan Discussion**

The presentation can be found on slides 4-47 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Mark introduced the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) and shared that each section will include a chance to ask questions about how the data shared will integrate into the Commission's goals. Taylor Johnson, the policy and data advocacy manager at the Indiana Youth Institute, introduced himself and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share data and the ongoing relationship to improve children's lives. He started by sharing the statistic that Indiana has the 14<sup>th</sup> largest child population in the nation and broke down their racial and ethnic demographics. Taylor echoed Justice David's point about children's percentage of the population, showing 23.6 percent, but how they will become 100 percent of the future's leaders, workforce, and community members. Citing rankings from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Taylor showed Indiana's national rankings in areas of child well-being, including, health, education, economics, and more. He showed rankings from previous years, indicating that they have improved from the past. He outlined that the presentation would dive further into each ranking area. Starting with family and community, Taylor briefly outlined adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their prevalence which are higher for Hoosier children than the national average. He then showed state rankings measured by single parent families, household head diploma status, poverty rates, and teen births, all of which improved from years past. He warned that some statistics that require self-reporting are likely to be under-reported. Next, he showed rates of technology access in the household by grade, showing an overall decrease in the number of kids without internet access. He showed how Covid-19 and many resources expanded this access, but called for continuing this expansion so that students are not falling behind. He showed the Commission's strategic goals relevant to these statistics and opened himself and Mark to questions. Taylor transitioned into health statistics by explaining that telehealth and healthcare access are in shortage. He showed the ratios of providers, including physicians, mental health professionals, social workers, nurses, and dentists to kids. Access and costs were reported as the two biggest reasons for limits to care. Next, he showed rates of mental health education/training of school professionals and students, indicating increases in recent years. He showed statistics of student self-reported mental health experiences which portrayed racial/ethnic breakdowns of feelings of sadness and hopelessness. He reiterated that these are kids, not just numbers or percentages. Next, Taylor showed the rates of suicidal ideation, planning, and attempts of students in grades 7-12 in 2022. He showed racial and ethnically marginalized groups and members of the LGBTQ+ community experience

depression and suicide at rates often double their white, heterosexual peers. Taylor paused for questions on how Commission objectives relate to the health domain. Next, transitioning to education, Taylor showed rankings of kids not in school, proficiency in reading and math, and high schoolers not graduating on time. He then showed proficiency statistics disaggregated by race and gender, indicating declines in most areas since 2020. Next, showing high school dropout and college enrollment rates, Taylor commented on the correlational decrease in both. With 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars enrollment and FAFSA completion rates decreasing as well, Taylor hopes to see improvements in the data with the recent passing of HEA1449. Next, he shared an overall increase in college on-time completion and opened for questions after showing the Commission's educational strategic goals. For the last category, economic well-being, Taylor began with statistics regarding the demand and toll for early childhood care and education. Breaking down the ratings by county, Taylor showed how infant care is more expensive than in-state college tuition. He showed the average incomes of families and costs of childcare across the state. Taylor mentioned he did not want to go over his allotted time and opened himself to questions on how economic statistics relate to the Commission's strategic goals. He thanked everyone for the opportunity to present.

**Discussion:** Representative Summers asked Taylor if minority groups experience the same lack of access to technology outlined in his presentation. He shared that his presentation showed the access rates by grade level but would be open to exploring how the numbers correspond to race and ethnicity. Mark shared that Indiana Youth Institute can dig into different data points for Commission members if they are curious to know more. Bernice Corley asked Taylor ACEs, adult supervision, and internet access, wondering if unsupervised internet access could compound other issues. Taylor agreed that access to technology can be a double-edged sword and that internet access data collection is new, so he hopes to see if there is a way to monitor implications in the future. Senator Donato referenced her experience attempting to expand access to technology in her district, sharing that educational devices controlled by schools can be monitored and controlled. During the health section discussion, Senator Breaux asked Taylor if the depression rate statistics were broken down by sexuality, to which he answered yes and shared that data. Bernice Corley asked Taylor to return to the slide about health provider ratios. She wanted to emphasize how early intervention strategies can be bolstered simply by increasing the rates of nurses in schools, who not only can catch physical concerns but also refer out for the mental health issues. Mark mentioned an upcoming school-based Medicaid reimbursement which will allow schools to receive funding for services they are mandated to do and increase the credibility for those providers. Senator Breaux shared an account of personal experience with a student contemplating suicide and shared her desire to investigate what is driving the high suicidal ideation rates. Taylor agreed with looking to expand the search for root causes, but mentioned the problems are usually multi-layered. Senator Donato suggested having Indiana Youth Institute report back to the Commission in the future. Mark mentioned that IYI is present in the Data Sharing and Mapping Committee under the Commission and can take further action/questions there if need be. Dr. Weaver shared that the Department of Health's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) does include questions about bullying and other causes of depression and suicide. She shared concern of the high suicide rates and how schools not participating in the YRBS will make it difficult to track improvement or setbacks. Senator Breaux suggested exploring a legislative path to school participation in the YRBS. Dr. Weaver mentioned how schools can opt in to get funding for a school-health liaison, which will hopefully help with some of these issues. She shared only 20 counties have opted in and encouraged sharing this information. Taylor clarified that his presentation included data from both the YRBS and the Indiana Youth Survey.

## 5. Data Sharing and Mapping Committee **Update on the Vulnerable Youth Dashboard**

The presentation can be found on slides 48-57 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Josie Fasoldt introduced herself and listed the many groups represented on the Committee. Nikki Ford introduced herself and explained the goal of the vulnerable youth dashboard. She shared the overall goal as to provide a single place that shows data for youth being served by the different state systems. The goals included creating a holistic picture, finding overlaps, and measuring potential outcomes. She briefly showed the Commission's statutory definition of vulnerable youth and passed the presentation to Tyler Brown. He thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share and

started by explaining the three sections of the dashboard. These included a geographical data map, an overlap of systems involvement chart, and an outcomes dashboard. Tyler shared that the first phase is currently underway and on track, hoping for a release of the first dashboard this fall.

**Discussion:** Dr. Finnell asked which identifiers the overlap chart will include, to which Tyler responded that the Committee is starting with the Department of Education's at-risk youth populations. Bernice Corely asked if the dashboard will include youth in the juvenile delinquency system, to which Tyler reiterated that the Commission's vulnerable youth definition includes this group, and they are a part of future phases. Bernice asked who he would collect this data from, and Tyler explained that the Committee is working with the courts.

## 6. Youth Engagement Stephaney Knight and Diana Owens

The Presentation can be found on slides 58-83 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Stephaney introduced herself and Diana and shared the timeline of her term ending and two new youth representatives beginning soon. Diana briefly outlined the goals of Foster Success, including educational success, youth engagement, financial empowerment, health and well-being, and workforce readiness. Stephaney mentioned today's topic will focus on authentic youth engagement, which highlights the relevant point in engaging with systems leaders. Diana emphasized authenticity and the priority of leaders to design a structure that plays to the young person's strengths. Stephaney outlined three levels of engagement, including individual, peer-lead, and systems level. Diana showed the three different levels of attitudes that adults may have, including seeing young people as objects, recipients, or the desired goal, partners. Stephaney mentioned authentically engaging young people can benefit their brain development/healing and many skills, including decision-making, professional communication, and self-esteem. Diana echoed that young people in critical development periods can benefit if they are active participants in the engagement process. Stephaney explained that these partnerships can include structures like the Commission or individual conversations. Diana mentioned the importance of preparation in these partnerships, checking in with young people, relationship building, and being flexible. Stephaney explained the term of strategic sharing, which is the telling of a personal story in a safe and effective way to achieve a goal. Diana shared some of the opportunities to engage young people, including workgroups, social media campaigns, advisory boards, conferences, and more. Stephaney explained the ways to support young people, including physically, emotionally, and financially. Diana and Stephaney thanked the Commission.

**Discussion:** Senator Donato complimented Stephaney and thanked her for her work on the Commission over the last term. Stephaney introduced Aly Leonard and Michael Owens as the next youth representatives. Aly shared that she is excited to get started, learn more about the Commission, and to meet everybody.

## 7. Executive Director and Committee Updates Mark Fairchild

Mark began by thanking Stephaney and DeJuna for all their work during their term together. Mark recapped a recent meeting he had with the Commission's task force and committee chairs, explaining that they revisited the strategic plan and explored ways to incorporate the new coordinator. He also shared the chairs voiced a desire to include more measurable objectives, so he and Commission members and staff are working to include this better. Mark thanked the legislative Commission members for the recent budget, highlighting the ability to do more with youth engagement, expanding the intern amount and role, and hiring a full-time coordinator. He also shared details of recent grant funding from Casey Family Programs to host a youth and family engagement summit. Mark briefly outlined the coordinator application process and announced Blane Cook, the Commission's most recent intern, as the hire. He then shared excitement to continuing expanding the role and impact of the Commission given its increase in funding, staff, and other support.

## 8. Discussion: Future Meeting Topics or Other Items from Commission Members

Senator Donato welcomed and congratulated Blane and asked Dejana, who was joining the meeting virtually, if she could show the Commission her newborn. Dejana shared her baby's name and birthweight, and Senator Donato congratulated her and thanked her for all her work. Mark suggested extending the next meeting's time slot so that the Youth Justice Oversight Committee could present their report and discuss the Commission's role in implementation. Representative Summers mentioned 9:00am meetings can be hard to get to for people outside of Indianapolis. Mark said he will explore other options. Senator Donato thanked Stephaney and Dejana again for their service.

## 9. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:46 a.m.

### **Next Meeting**

Wednesday, August 16, 2023, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.