



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Annual Report

July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025

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Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Dear fellow Hoosier,

The past year has been a challenging and exciting one for the Commission on Improving the Status of Children. As administration changed in many areas of state government, we were glad to see that our work remained recognized as a point where all three branches of state government joined for one purpose – protecting and improving the well-being of Hoosier children. This was evident during our many conversations, presentations, and initiatives, where the energy to make positive and lasting changes has never been higher.

I will highlight a few of our proudest moments here, but I urge you to read through the full report to see the complete landscape of what we have accomplished to date and what we look forward to addressing in the coming year. None of this can be credited to individual efforts, but rather to the tremendous power of the hundreds of volunteers, policymakers, agency leadership, and lived-experience experts that make up our Commission. We thank all who serve for your dedication, knowledge, and sacrifice to the cause of giving our children the best lives possible.

In the most recent state fiscal year, we were able to continue offering training and support to youth and young adults seeking to add their voices to the issues directly impacting them. This included a multi-day Strategic Sharing Summit, our annual Day of the Child at the Indiana Statehouse, an in-person academy for advanced training, and the expansion of youth and parent representation on our task forces, subcommittees, and our BEST Youth Initiative team. While we still have a tremendous amount to learn in this space, it is clear that Hoosier youth and families are excited to lend their expertise to our work.

The momentum from those efforts fueled our desire to go further and led the Commission to put forward House Enrolled Act 1098. Entitled “Youth, Family, and Caregiver Engagement Initiative” and introduced by Representative Dale DeVon, it gave us new duties and charges including the creation of a state plan to engage those individuals. Hoosier youth, families, and caregivers are true experts in ways to improve our systems, and this legislation was written to send a clear message that Indiana is a state that listens, empowers, and acts in the best interests of all our children and families. Our legislators agreed, passing the bill into law with unanimity throughout the entire legislative process.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of those who have previously contributed to the Commission on Improving the Status of Children that have moved on to new roles and opportunities. Special thanks to John R. Hammond, IV, for serving a record number of terms as chairperson, including through some of our most formative years.



For the children,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark A. Fairchild".

Mark A. Fairchild, MSW
Executive Director

Commission Meetings

State Fiscal Year: July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025



Pictured left to right: Lindsay Weaver, M.D., Youth Representative Julia Stumler, and Hon. Dana Kenworthy.

August 2024

At its August meeting, the Children's Commission heard updates from Youth Representative Aly Leonard on the BEST Youth Initiative, the Department of Child Services on prevention programs, Dr. Rachel Yoder on the "Be Happy" program, and State Director Rae Feller on Guardian ad Litem and Court Appointed Special Advocate supports. Additionally, it was noted that the Commission's 2024 Annual Report was available and the Commission's inaugural cohort of Senator Jean Breaux Collaboration Fellows was announced.

October 2024

At its October meeting, the Children's Commission welcomed Kathryn Box from the Governor's Office and thanked John Hammond for his many years of service. Dr. Jack Turman, Director of the Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Initiative at Indiana University, presented on housing stability programming for families with children. Consultant Uma Ahluwalia from the Forum for Youth Investment provided an update on the BEST Youth Initiative, summarizing main themes from stakeholder interviews regarding chronic absenteeism.

Lastly, Mark Fairchild mentioned the Commission's upcoming Strategic Sharing Summit and offered a budget proposal to increase support for statewide family and youth engagement efforts, which was approved unanimously.

January 2025

At its January meeting, the Children's Commission welcomed new members and heard updates on the BEST Youth Initiative; youth, family, and caregiver engagement efforts; and the status of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee. It also heard presentations on two bills that the Commission assisted in

authoring, a recap of the Strategic Sharing Summit, and plans for Day of the Child events. Lastly, members heard updates from the co-chairs of each task force and committee, who shared areas of focus and future needs.

February 2025

At its February meeting, the Children's Commission heard updates on the BEST Youth Initiative's discovery report and next steps, a presentation on the City Connects program from Marian University, and legislative updates on issues of chronic absenteeism, juvenile justice, youth advocacy, and time to permanency.

April 2025

The April meeting opened with Adam Krupp, Director of the Department of Child Services (DCS), acknowledging Child Abuse Prevention Month and his appreciation for DCS staff and all those partnering in their work. Next, Jamie Devine with the Office of Court Services presented the findings of listening sessions conducted on behalf of the Court Improvement Program. This was followed by the current cohort of Jean Breaux Collaboration Fellows presenting their work. Payton Bowling provided a comprehensive overview of the needs of people with disabilities, specifically as applicable to the issue of chronic absenteeism. Alyssa Newsom gave an update

on the various youth, family, and caregiver engagement activities of the Commission and ideas for next steps. The Commission Executive Director then presented legislative updates on bills directly supported by the Commission.

June 2025

The June meeting opened with a presentation from the Indiana Youth Institute, covering highlights from their 2025 Kids Count Data Book. The data discussion continued with a presentation from the

Court Improvement Program, which included gains in time to permanency and the progress of collaborations between the courts and state agencies. Next, the Commission Executive Director presented final legislative updates on bills directly supported by the Commission. Finally, it was noted that development for our 2026-2028 strategic plan will begin soon, with discussion on the plan expected to occur at the October and December meetings.



Executive Director Mark Fairchild stands before speaking to attendees of the Day of the Child event in the Indiana House of Representatives.

FAMILY & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

All solutions are more effective if those who are expected to benefit from them participate in the process of developing them. The Commission continued and expanded our work to include lived-experience voices wherever possible.



CISC Youth Representatives Transition

In July of 2023, the Commission welcomed our 2nd cohort of young adult members as lived-experience experts. As the terms of Julia Stumler and Aly Leonard come to a close, they will continue our practice of selecting their successors for the next set of CISC youth representatives. Below are a few thoughts shared by Julia on her time with us.

“My term with the Commission ended this June, but the lessons, advocacy, and relationships I’ve gained will carry far beyond. It has been an invaluable experience to work for CISC alongside the bright, innovative, and forward-thinking changemakers that our work attracts. CISC is a shining example of what incorporating the voices of lived-experts and systemic recipients can do when we are empowered not only to speak but to lead. The collaboration this team brings is nothing short of incredible.

I am forever grateful for the experience of working with such a driven and actionable team. I leave with gratitude, pride, and confidence in the next lived-experience cohort to continue this important work.”

- Julia Stumler

2024-2025 Strategic Sharing Initiatives

The Commission was glad to continue offering a fall learning opportunity with our multi-day Strategic Sharing Summit. This event focused on the power of personal storytelling, the significance of lived experiences, and practical strategies for harnessing stories to drive meaningful change and systemic transformation. The summit featured keynote speaker Anthony Barrows, a training on strategic sharing, and a peer-led young adult panel discussion across three sessions that highlighted how sharing personal stories can amplify the voices of those with lived experience.

The discussions started during the event continued at our 2025 Strategic Sharing Academy, where participants further sharpened their skills to make an impact with their voices and experiences.

Indiana BEST Youth Initiative Team

In 2024, Indiana was one of just five states selected to participate in the Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving (BEST) Youth Initiative, a three-year program led by the Forum for Youth Investment. Our state team focused on reducing chronic absenteeism and bringing together Indiana’s Department of Education; Division of Mental Health and Addiction; Department of Health, Commission on Improving the Status of Children; Office of Court Services; and many other state agency partners. The team also includes youth and parents with lived experience, ensuring we are informed by those directly impacted by the issue.

Much of the first year was spent in the discovery phase, where we researched model practices while also interviewing and visiting groups engaged in chronic absenteeism prevention. Our findings were that many different models of prevention and intervention existed across the state and that there was strength in this local customization.

We also found many areas where additional funding and resources would be beneficial as well as improved data collection and

analysis. As we craft a strategic plan based around these findings, we look forward to opportunities to build upon local strengths while ensuring they have access to the support they most need.



Youth Representative Aly Leonard presents on the BEST Youth Initiative at the August 2024 CISC meeting.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The Commission tracks a vast array of legislation with potential impacts on Hoosier children and families each year as they move through the Statehouse. Below are a few highlights from the 2025 Indiana Legislative Session, each of which passed into law and directly relates to our priorities.



HEA 1098: Youth, Family, and Caregiver Engagement Initiative

This legislation was introduced by the Commission's Representative Dale DeVon to expand the CISC's work on youth, family, and caregiver engagement, while building mechanisms to support best practices for working with lived-experience experts.

It provides that the CISC must create and provide staff support to a statewide youth, family, and caregiver engagement initiative to:

- Support the CISC Youth Representatives and youth, family, and caregiver members of CISC task forces, committees, and subcommittees.
- Develop a statewide plan to support, encourage, and expand the engagement of youth, families, and caregivers in policymaking impacting youth and children.
- Provide and support educational opportunities, convenings, and other experiences that facilitate increased youth, family, and caregiver participation.
- Support state agencies and community organizations to encourage and expand the engagement of youth, families, and caregivers.
- Solicit direct feedback from youth, families, and caregivers to inform Commission recommendations concerning

points of complexity and inefficiency in child serving systems; duplication of services and potential points of consolidation; improving time to permanency; and reducing the trauma of systems involvement.

HEA 1403: Juvenile Justice Matters

This legislation amends the duties of the Youth Justice Oversight Committee (YJOC) to reflect its ongoing work in the implementation of its plans, including:

- Research, identify, and make recommendations regarding barriers to implementation, including systemic, legislative, data collection, and both effective and ineffective interventions.
- Research, identify, and make recommendations regarding the needs of rural communities with a limited-service capacity.
- Support education and outreach regarding the statewide procedures, protocols, policies, and processes identified in the YJOC plans.

- Support the juvenile diversion, community alternatives, and behavioral health grants allocated by the Indiana General Assembly to implement those elements of the YJOC plans.
- Partner with the CISC to integrate the expertise of youth, families, and caregivers with direct experience into the YJOC.

SEA 482: Absenteeism and Student Discipline

This legislation builds on the legislative efforts of SB 282 (2024) regarding absenteeism, bringing additional policies and practices to reduce its occurrence. It also defines “chronically absent” as missing 10% or more of a school year for any reason and seeks to improve data collection and analysis. Specific provisions require the Indiana Department of Education and local schools to do the following:

- IDOE must create a list of best practices to reduce student discipline and absenteeism.
- IDOE must study and prepare a report regarding the basis for the categorization of certain suspensions and expulsions.

- IDOE must establish a categorization framework for excused absences based on the reason for the absence.

- IDOE must collect certain information regarding absences from school corporations and charter schools and prepare and post a report regarding the information on the department’s website.

- Provides that the absence policy adopted by a school corporation must provide for the categorization of excused absences in accordance with the categorization framework established by IDOE.
- Requires a public school to hold an attendance conference not later than 10 instructional days (instead of five as previously required) after the fifth absence.
- Prohibits a public school from expelling or suspending a student solely because the student is chronically absent or a habitual truant.

Commission Members



**Audrey
Arbogast**

Chief of Staff,
Indiana's Office of Health and Family
Services

**appointed June 2025*



**Justin
Forkner**

Chief Administrative Officer,
Indiana Supreme Court



**Bernice
Corley**

Executive Director,
Indiana Public Defender Council



**Kory
George**

Chief Probation Officer,
Wayne County



**Terrie
Decker**

Executive Director,
Indiana Department of Correction,
Division of Youth Services



**Senator
La Keisha Jackson**

Indiana State Senator,
District 34



**Representative
Dale DeVon**

Indiana State Representative,
District 5



**Katie
Jenner, Ed. D.**

Indiana Secretary of Education



**Senator
Stacey Donato**

Indiana State Senator,
District 18



**Honorable
Dana Kenworthy**

Court of Appeals of Indiana



Adam Krupp
Director,
Department of Child Services



Mitch Roob
Secretary,
Family and Social Services Administration



Aly Leonard
Youth Representative



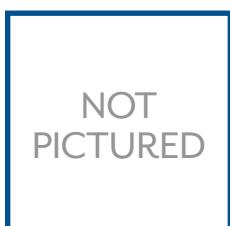
Sarah Sailors
Director,
Family and Social Services
Administration, Division of Mental
Health and Addiction



Chris Naylor
Executive Director,
Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council



Julia Stumler
Youth Representative



Chad Ranney
Indiana State Budget Director

**appointed June 2025*



**Representative
Vanessa Summers**
Indiana State Representative,
District 99



Todd Rokita
Indiana Attorney General

Task Force & Committee Members

Child Health & Safety Task Force

Sonya Rush, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Child Services

Kate Schedel, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Health
**succeeded in February 2025 by Olivia Shaw, Indiana Department of Health*

Tammie Carter
LifeSmart Youth

Christina Commons
FSSA, First Steps

Natasha Crespo
Indiana Disability Rights

Maureen Greer
Indiana Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative

Maria Grinston
Indiana Department of Child Services

Karen Hayden
Indiana Department of Child Services

Kristi Linson
Indiana Department of Health

Carey Michels
Family and Social Services Administration

Hannah Milner
Foster Success

Willie Taylor
Indiana Department of Child Services

Jack Turman
Indiana University, Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Initiative

Elizabeth Wahl
Family and Social Services Administration

Jeff Wittman
Prevent Child Abuse Indiana

Educational Outcomes Task Force

Brianna Morse, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Workforce Development
**succeeded in May 2025 by Megan Carlson, Indianapolis Public Schools*

Michelle Clarke, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Education

Ann Carruthers
Clark/Floyd System of Care

Shannon Chambers
Johnson County Government

Bart Doan
Indiana Department of Workforce Development

Rebekah Frazer
Indiana Department of Education

Melaina Gant
Indiana Department of Child Services

Bethany Goetz
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction

Natalie Hicks
IN*SOURCE

Koyauna Jones
Indiana Department of Education

Jonathan Kraeszig
Family and Social Services Administration

Jason Murrey
Indiana Department of Education

Kelsey Peaper
Indiana Department of Education

Rebecca Shetler-Fast
Child and Parent Services

Gil Smith
Indiana Department of Child Services

Christopher Stilwell
Indiana Department of Correction

Bryan Varner
Indiana Association of Home Educators

Jarod Wilson
Foster Success

Juvenile Justice & Cross-Systems Youth Task Force

Hon. Vicki Carmichael, Co-Chair
Clark Circuit Court 4

Nancy Wever, Co-Chair
Indiana Office of Court Services, Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative

Steve Balko
Indiana Department of Education

Amber Becker
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction

Kate Collins
Indiana Department of Child Services

Alison Cox
Indiana Juvenile Detention Association

Ann Davis
Indiana Association of Resources and Child Advocacy

Terrie Decker
Indiana Department of Correction

Chris Dixson
Indiana Department of Correction

Hon. Kimberly Dowling
Delaware Circuit Court 2

Tracy Fitz
Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council

James (Mike) Goodwin
Sullivan County DCS

JauNae Hanger
Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana

Waylon James
Indiana Department of Child Services

Jill Johnson
Marion County Public Defender Agency

Samantha Lewis
Wayne County Probation

Kiarra Pearson
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction

Leah Pezzarossi
Open Door Youth Services
Kaylee Price
Youth Representative
Kate Province
Public Defender of Indiana
Colleen Saylor
Indiana Office of Court Services
Ellen Sheets
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute
Don Travis
Indiana Department of Child Services
Joel Wieneke
Indiana Public Defender Council

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Task Force

Tanya Merritt-Mulamba, Co-Chair
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
David Reed, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Child Services
Jeannie Bellman
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
Sirilla Blackmon
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
Cathy Boggs
Community Health Network
Karin Gilbert
Bring Change to Mind
Julianne Guist, MD
Indiana University School of Medicine
Steve McCaffrey
Mental Health America of Indiana
Bridget McIntyre
Indiana Department of Child Services
Jason Murrey
Indiana Department of Education
Gabriela Rodríguez, PhD
Indiana University School of Medicine
Steve Viewhег
Indiana University School of Medicine

Data Sharing & Mapping Committee

Josie Fasoldt, Co-Chair
Central Indiana Corporate Partnership
Nikki Ford, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Child Services
Tyler Brown
Indiana Department of Education
Wendy Harrold
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
Christine Reynolds
Indiana Criminal Justice Institute
Kara Riley
Indiana Department of Child Services
Lisa Thompson
Indiana Office of Court Technology
Tamara Weaver
Office of the Indiana Attorney General
Bri Youn
Indiana Youth Institute
Amanda Zimmerman
Early Learning Indiana

Suicide Prevention, Bullying & Online Safety

Sarah Allison, Co-Chair
Indiana Department of Education
Michelle Fox, Co-Chair
FSSA, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
Kelsey Aaron
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Muna Abraham
Youth Representative
Jodi Alexander
One Community One Family
Brandy Anderson Willis
Essential Virtual Solutions
Stephen Balko
Indiana Department of Education
Charity Black
Family and Social Services Administration

Annie Cole
Bring Change 2 Mind
Kate Collins
Indiana Department of Child Services
Jayma Girdler
Youth Representative
Jeremy Greenlee
Indiana Youth Services Association
Olivia Hesler
Indiana Department of Health
Esther Lewis
Holistic Evolution
Jason Murrey
Indiana Department of Education
Brigitt Nasby
Indiana Youth Services Association
Myeshia Price
Indiana University
Lorrie Ramsey
Indiana Department of Health
Melanie Roberts
Indiana Department of Health
Caitlyn Short
Family and Social Services Administration
Rai Singh
Youth Representative
Crystal Sisson
Holly's House
Larry Smith
Males with a Plan
Bethany Stewart
Sagamore Institute
Nikki Sullivan
LifeSmart Youth
Erin Tuttle
Office of the Indiana Attorney General
Rachel Van Alstine
Parent Coalition



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