



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Wednesday April 21, 2021

Zoom Meeting

- 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
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Curtis T. Hill, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Susan Lightfoot, Chief Probation Officer, Henry County Probation Department
- Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Justice Loretta Rush, Chief Justice of Indiana
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Dr. Jennifer Sullivan, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Representative Vanessa Summers

1. Welcome and Introductions

John Hammond called the meeting to order at 10:02 and welcomed all Commission members and guests.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: The consent agenda, including the minutes of the December meeting, was moved by John Hammond, seconded and approved by a vote of 9-0.

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

**a. Presentation by Nina Salomon, Council of State Governments
Final Report of the Preliminary Juvenile Justice Assessment**

Presentation can be found on slides [3-37 of the meeting PowerPoint](#). Nina presented the overview, key findings, and recommendations of the preliminary assessment of Indiana's juvenile justice system that CSG completed in conjunction with the [Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force](#).

Discussion:

- John Hammond asked what the biggest barriers were to diversion, and how the Commission might think about those both collectively and in their individual capacities.
 - o Nina said that some counties are diverting low risk youth out of the system with good success, but it's generally very subjective. There are opportunities to standardize the process in some way across the state while allowing for local flexibility by using a diversion screening tool, for example. For law enforcement, it could help to have a community based civil citation program. Another opportunity is simply educating all partners on the fact that bringing low-level youth into the system to get them services is not necessarily helpful and can make the situation worse. Most youth who are eligible for diversion based on objective criteria never penetrate the system further and do fine without services.
- The Chief Justice expressed surprise that there was not consistent use of the IYAS, which has been adopted statewide, and asked Susan Lightfoot to provide a perspective from probation. She also said she was familiar with civil citation programs in other jurisdictions, and asked whether those needed to be set up legislatively.
 - o Susan replied that the tool is being administered, but how the information it supplies is utilized varies from county to county. She mentioned that a certain number of youth may be needed to run a program, and there's been discrepancy over the years with different counties putting more weight on the IYAS (and IRAS—the adult tool) in regard to how they are utilizing programing.
 - o Nina said CSG was told the tool is being used as a formality but the results of the tool were not given a lot of weight by judges and their decision making or by probation officers in terms of case planning. In terms of the question of diversion, in Florida for example, the civil citation program is in statute. They created a statutory framework for local jurisdictions to develop their own civil citation programs and then created a funding structure so they could incentivize jurisdictions to utilize that civil citation model to divert additional kids from the system. A lot of diversion approaches are in statutes because it creates a guided framework across the state and it creates a funding mechanism or a way to get counties on board.
- Chief Justice Rush asked Judge Galvin of Monroe County whether the juvenile judges have seen the presentation or should see it.
 - o Judge Galvin replied that he hoped it would be presented at the meeting in June. He mentioned that in Monroe County, applying some of these principles has led to having zero kids in secure detention today and making the community safer with better outcomes for children.
 - o Julie Whitman will connect with the Education Division and see if they can make room in the June conference agenda for this presentation.
- Bernice Corley commended the work and the report. She asked whether CSG felt Indiana had enough data in place to pinpoint the specific decisions points that are resulting in such a high incarceration rate for Black youth.
 - o Nina replied that Indiana is not alone in its racial disparities. Across the country, incarceration, referrals to juvenile court, and even suspensions and expulsions from school have gone down significantly, yet disparities remain the same or have increased. Emily Rogers from CSG stated that there is some data that CSG can look at and take a deeper dive to get a little more information. Particularly about what types of offenses and what the legal reasons for holding youth. Looking specifically at the JDAI counties, there might be some

information that gives some clues about what's happening. Nina noted that CSG has identified a number of counties that are using the same data system for both court and probation, which could provide an opportunity in the next phase to take a look at DOC data, detention, JDAI, but also all of the counties that are using the same data. CSG could potentially just take those counties and do the deeper dive looking at every decision point, from referrals through probation supervision. They can't do it at a statewide level because the data isn't linked at a statewide level, but they can probably do it in ten or so counties.

- Julie said that it looked like there was money included in the state budget to continue with the next phase of the work.
- John Hammond asked CSG to pass on which counties are diverting a number of youth so that others are aware.
- Zac Jackson mentioned that the state budget was available online as of that morning.
- Nina noted that Indiana has a lot of good practices to build on and scale up.

b. Presentation by Matt Gooding, Department of Child Services and Mike Gray, Madison County Probation

Findings and recommendations of the Emergency Shelter Care Subcommittee

Presentation can be found on slides [39-45 of the meeting PowerPoint](#). Matt and Mike described the process of bringing their subcommittee together, surveying shelter care providers and others in the field, and coming to their conclusions and recommendations. They found that shelter care is underutilized in some cases, but also that foster care is a good alternative to shelter care for many youth, if proper training and support is provided for foster families to take in older youth and youth on probation.

The subcommittee presented five recommendations: (1) create a [SharePoint site](#) for sharing information about the availability of shelter care with those who are placing children, (2) [increase the utilization](#) of shelter care for non-overnight stays, (3) provide [education for foster parents](#) on older youth/teen brain, (4) make special efforts to [recruit foster parents](#) who are willing to take in older youth, and (5) provide [training to shelter care providers](#) on how to care for higher acuity youth.

Action: Rep. DeVon made a motion to approve all recommendations; Zac Jackson seconded. The motion was passed 12-0

Presentation by Stephen Balko, Indiana Department of Education

Serious and Violent Delinquent Behavior

Presentation can be found on [slides 47 of the meeting PowerPoint](#). Steve gave an update from his subcommittee on preventing serious and violent delinquent behavior. The group has agreed upon a [definition](#) and is starting to request data on the number, type, and location of those events that meet the definition over the past several years. They will then analyze the data and work on recommending strategies for prevention.

4. Strategic Priority: Child Health and Safety

a. Kate Schedel, Indiana Department of Health

Presentation: Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs

Presentation can be found on [slides 49-59 in the meeting PowerPoint](#). Kate presented information on Indiana's teen pregnancy rates and other health-related indicators for adolescents, and highlighted evidence-based pregnancy prevention programming being done with a federal grant the state recently received for the first time.

Discussion:

- Bernice Corley asked if the life skills training is implemented in schools and whether the curriculum cover prophylactics and birth control.
 - o Kate answered that the curriculum can be implemented in school as well as after school. The Boys and Girls Club does all after school programming. Life Skills curriculum chose to focus on positive youth development. It is not teaching anything about birth control methods. Kate mentioned that the research evidence behind the program shows that youth build the skills that help them to avoid pregnancy. Dr. Box added that one of the goals of the Life Skills program is to connect youth with trusted health care representatives that they can have those discussions with.
- Bernice asked whether a youth who attends the class and then decides they do want to secure a prophylactic or something to engage in safe sex, are they able to get those or do they have someone to go to?
 - o Dr. Box said the program does not facilitate this access directly, but these programs are about connecting them to peers and adults that they can trust that they can have these conversations with and to help them know what their resources are. To be able to, depending on the decisions they are making, not only know the repercussions of those decisions but also the risks associated with those decisions and the ability to minimize those repercussions.
- Terry Stidgon asked if there is any way to identify youth that have been in foster care and overlay that data that ISDH has on teen pregnancy.
 - o Kate replied that ISDH is more than happy to combine data and see how to reach more foster youth, and Dr. Box agreed.
- Rep. DeVon asked about opening up the discussion in classrooms about what life might look like if you have a child, and what life might look like if you choose not to. He said he would love to create a program in our schools that can reach more kids.
 - o Dr. Box replied that it is a great suggestion and that it doesn't have to be a burden on teachers, as there are people who are willing to go out there and offer this kind of information to youth. She noted that in current health classes, youth are getting very little exposure to support from the mental health standpoint or support for their life choice decisions whether that be substances they're using or risky sexual activity or suicidal thoughts. There's not a lot of support there right now for that kind of education in the school system. Dr. Box would be more than happy to work with IDOE from a health perspective to reinstitute some of the science-based health education that is not currently happening, as supported across the state, depending on the district.
 - o Kate added that the State Department of Health does offer sexual risk avoidance in schools across the state, and they hope to achieve some weighted data with the youth risk behavior survey this year to better understand what is going on with youth.

b. Heather Kestian and David Reed, DCS

Presentation: Family First Prevention and Services Act: Implementation Update

Presentation can be found on slides 60-73 in the [meeting PowerPoint](#). David and Heather gave updates on DCS's family preservation program and its progress toward implementing the provisions of the FFPSA, which must begin to be implemented by September 30, 2021.

5. Executive Director and Committee Updates

Julie provided brief updates from the committees and highlighted HB 1537, which will add two young adults who fit the definition of vulnerable youth that's in the statute that created the commission. Over the next month or two Julie will be working on building the infrastructure to make that successful, and the goal will be to have them in the first meeting of the new fiscal year. Julie also stated that the bill tracker is on the web site, and a more complete and concise version will be created after the legislative session ends.

6. Commission Members Legislative Highlights
Rep. DeVon mentioned that a lot of legislation was dealing with COVID this year. He also highlighted SB 301 and noted that the legislature would be open to any changes or modifications as it moves forward and gets put into practice.
7. Discussion: Future Meeting Topics or other items from Commission Members
John thanked all Commission members for their attendance and noted that attendance has been very strong and “the word is out” on the Commission and its important work. John asked if any Commission members had topics to suggest, and none were offered.
8. Next Meeting: June 16, 2021, 10am – 12pm on Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 p.m.