



# Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

## Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana  
Wednesday, December 6, 2023  
Indiana Government Center South

- Terrie Decker, Department of Correction (non-voting attendee for Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services)
- 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
- 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. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Eric Miller, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Aly Leonard, Youth Commission Member
- Julia Stumler, Youth Commission Member

### 1. Welcome

Senator Donato called the meeting to order at 10:00am and welcomed guests. She also announced the Commission's new Youth Representatives, Julia Stumler, who introduced herself and shared enthusiasm.

### 2. Consent Agenda

**Action:** The [minutes from the October meeting](#) were motioned by Representative DeVon, seconded by Zac Jackson, approved unanimously 12-0.

### 3. Legislative Affairs and Engagement

**Mark Fairchild**

The presentation can be found on slides 3-6 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Mark recapped the last meeting's discussion around creating a process to decide which legislative topics the Commission will address and their legislative involvement approach during the upcoming session. He reminded the Commission of their previous decision to approve items explicitly written on the [Strategic Plan](#) for legislative involvement. He gave the example of legislation involving human trafficking as fitting perfectly with language in the Strategic Plan and Task Force activities. He transitioned to a new list that included issues that Commission members wanted to compile that were not explicitly written on the strategic plan that can be eligible for involvement and discussion. He mentioned the topics of early childhood mental health, suicide and bullying prevention, improving the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) participation rates, supporting the Youth Justice Oversight Committee (YJOC), and increasing access to quality childcare.

**Discussion:** Senator Breaux asked if the broad topic of reducing unplanned teenage pregnancy could be added to the list. Mark clarified by explaining that this topic is already included in the Strategic Plan, so it would be approved as eligible for Commission involvement. Senator Breaux also asked Mark to clarify the first example bill that he mentioned. Mark explained that in a previous session, legislation was filed to address Child in Need of Services (CHINS) 3.5 cases but did not get a hearing. Being reintroduced again, this bill removes the requirement for youth to admit or deny being trafficked while also appointing them legal counsel. Chris Naylor mentioned the topic of social media with minors and its ties with bullying, suicide, and mental health, suggesting that this topic could be an issue for the Commission to investigate in the future. John Hammond agreed and mentioned that even though the Strategic Plan may not include specific language about social media, there are several relevant items that incorporate it.

**Action:** To approve the Issues for Legislative Action, was motioned by John Hammond, seconded by Eric Miller, and approved unanimously 12-0.

Mark introduced more priorities of the Commission, which included introductions with each legislator, following up with them mid-session, and making sure they all are receiving the Commission's updates. He also shared that the Commission will be presenting to the Family and Children Committees from each chamber on January 11 at 8:30 a.m. Mark outlined the Commission's plan to incorporate the annual "State of the Child" presentation with the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI) and recent desires to host an advocacy day at the Statehouse. In cooperation with IYI and the Marion County Commission on Youth (MCCOY), the Commission is combining these ideas and helping host the inclusive event on February 19. Mark opened the floor to other legislative engagement opportunities.

**Discussion:** Senator Donato suggested that Commission members who are heads of agencies could contact legislative chambers to do introductions too, offering to help with facilitation.

**Action:** To approve the Legislative Engagement Agenda, was motioned by Representative DeVon, seconded by Eric Miller, and approved unanimously 12-0.

#### **4. Family and Youth Engagement Summit Recap**

##### **Blane Cook and Youth Representatives**

The presentation can be found on slides 7-13 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Blane spoke about the Summit's theme, "Unmuting Your Authenticity," which resonated throughout portions of the summit as professionals and members of the community were able to share authentically how they advocate for others. Blane noted that 83% of individuals registered for the Summit participated, which is a metric the Commission staff was excited about. After recapping the attendance statistics, Blane mentioned that 1/4 of all registrants and 2/3 of participants with lived experience indicated they had multiple identifiers, highlighting a diverse audience. Blane then discussed recaps of each day's content and discussions. Blane noted that the first day's keynote with Kayla Powell was the second most-watched part of the Summit where she described 7 tips on how to be an authentic

professional. The most watched session was the Parents and Families panel. He shared how Stephaney and DeJuna emphasized the importance of having this panel. Blane recapped the first day by explaining it was a day for young adults and families with lived experience to explain what they need from professionals to feel like they can advocate for themselves and others, and for professionals to know what they can do to provide support. He mentioned the youth with lived experience panel was the third most watched panel of the day, and the legislator panel was the second most watched panel on day two. Blane outlined the rest of day two, where young adults were able to discuss their advocacy journeys and some community professionals plugged advocacy opportunities. Blane spoke about 2024's Summit planning considering a multiday webinar event to keep it accessible. Initial feedback included learning about more about opportunities for those with lived experience and experts to engage in Commission activities, having parent involvement on the Commission, developing opportunities for experts to learn about policy development, and developing a training series for legislative stakeholders that would be co-led by our lived experience panelists. Blane alerted those who participated to look out for a survey and asked them to provide feedback on how they thought the Summit went. Blane also indicated the link that participants used to access the live Summit is the same one to use if they want to look back and re-watch any sessions. Blane passed the floor over to Julia, who talked about how the Summit was her first, and that it was overall an enjoyable experience. Aly agreed with Julia and mentioned that she would like to another legislative panel in the future.

**Discussion:** Representative DeVon asked how many years the Summit has been facilitated and if it were to be in-person, how much would that affect participation. Blane responded that the event has been happening for two years and that for it to be held in person would limit state-wide participation. Mark jumped in noting that it would be possible to include a webinar series that would lead up to an in-person event which is something that is currently on the horizon. Mark also mentioned that virtual options are more accessible for youth and families with lived experience.

## 5. Youth Risk Behavior Survey Presentation

### **Dr. Weaver and Kate Schedel**

The presentation can be found on slides 14-26 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Kate provided a recap of what the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) survey is, what it is designed to do, who takes it, and what the data is used for. Kate pointed out the Commission's attention to the state data from 2021 on mental health and suicide ideation as compared to national data. The compared data indicated that Indiana is much higher than the national average in most categories. Dr. Weaver clarified that students' attempts at suicide will look different and that they are not all presenting to the emergency room or being found injured. She mentioned that a suicide attempt can look like a student taking a few extra ibuprofens. Kate spoke about each data set regarding social connectedness and social media and noted that the data surrounding social connectedness cannot be compared to national data, as it has not been included in the national survey yet. Kate outlined the administration and school selection process, noting that schools only take one survey in the school year (either YRBS or Youth Tobacco Survey). After recapping the process, Kate talked about the roadblocks that impede the administration of the survey. These roadblocks include school closures or mergers, disapproval from superintendents or principals, principals expressing difficulty in gathering class and student data, permitting the survey to be administered during certain class times, or permitting a make-up day. Further roadblocks include parents indicating they do not want their children taking the survey and students opting out of questions or the entirety of the survey. Kate explained the importance of weighted data and how it can help agencies and programs like the Commission make decisions. Kate indicated that she would know if 2023's data is weighted around January or February.

**Discussion:** Representative Summers introduced the idea of either legislators or the Commission communicating with those whom superintendents report to stress the importance of administering the survey and the data. Senator Breau asked Dr. Weaver and Kate to speak about the consequences the state could receive for not getting weighted data. Kate answered that states who receive their weighted data and could speak to the specific issues affecting their children received \$11 million in federal grants to address the identified issues.

Senator Donato asked if Indiana is the only state that struggles to get weighted data. Kate answered that there are a multitude of reasons that states struggle whether it be lobbying groups or legislation, but that Indiana is one of the few states that struggles consistently to get weighted data. Representative DeVon asked if the Department of Education (DOE) is involved and if anyone representing the DOE is currently in the meeting. Kate answered that Dr. Jenner, Dr. Weaver, and the Children's Commission all signed a letter of support, but that it cannot be known if it will make an impact. Representative DeVon mentioned it would be beneficial for a representative from the DOE to be present at Commission meetings. Senator Breaux asked if anything came of the governor's request to get state-wide weighted data, and Dr. Weaver explained that it did not end up going through. Aly asked if there was a way for the survey to be administered online, to which Kate responded that while other states have the capacity to administer surveys via electronics, Indiana is not capable of that yet. Julia commented that the data received from the surveys carry a lot of weight and meaning, adding that children's mental health is more than state funding and data. Zac Jackson asked if private schools can opt-in to take the survey. Kate responded that she could ask the CDC if it is possible, and that she has always perpetuated the norm of surveying public schools. Senator Donato shared that she had a similar question but figured public schools get public funding. Representative DeVon asked if other states have private schools opt-in to take the survey, to which Kate replied that other states only survey public schools. Senator Donato asked if the report is connected to the DOE dashboard. Dr. Weaver and Kate answered that while they do not know if it is displayed on the DOE dashboard, it is displayed on the Department of Health website. Senator Donato explained it could be beneficial to have the report on the DOE's site thinking the parent of a child could find it faster. John Hammond expressed concern about data being traced to specific schools if the data were projected on the DOE website. Dr. Weaver mentioned it is a statewide data point and no schools would be identified. Senator Breaux asked if \$500 is a strong motivator for schools, and if not, would the idea of State matched dollars be motivating. Kate mentioned that some schools can be more motivated to participate than others. She mentioned that a common misconception about the survey that leads to the schools declining is that schools often think it is the entirety of the school that is being surveyed, when in reality it is about 50 kids during one hour of the day, in one semester. Senator Breaux asked what the reasons schools give when opting out of participation. Kate answered that the reasons vary between not having a policy and needing board approval to not wanting to participate because schools want data back from their specific school which is not possible. Senator Breaux asked if including state reimbursement in the state budget would help incentivize schools to participate. Dr. Weaver mentioned they are open to any support or suggestions, as they are doing everything within their power to increase participation. Representative DeVon explained he knows teachers and principals that feel the requirements of surveying and other such things to be burdensome and expresses support in finding how to make administering the survey easier for everyone. Senator Donato thanked Dr. Weaver and Kate for presenting, and suggested meeting with superintendents, principals, and their associations during conventions to express the importance of the surveys.

## **6. Task Force Updates**

The presentations can be found on slides 26-69 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Kate Schedel introduced herself and named the participating members of the Child Health and Safety Task Force. Kate mentioned while there is a lot of ebb and flow of participation, the task force has accomplished a lot and is very driven. Kate elaborated on the strategic goal and objectives the task force has and the highlights of 2023. Kate mentioned that the new strategic plan required the task force to reset and realign, so in 2024 the task force will continue with the set objectives and work on new ones.

Brianna Morse from the Education Outcomes Task Force reminded the Commission on the goals of her task force. Brianna mentioned this year the task force took a moment to reset their meetings to focus on the vulnerable populations and how the intersecting agencies involved can best support them. Brianna mentioned the highlights of what the task force has helped foster or orchestrate and finished with including how Commission members can help advance the task force's goals and objectives.

Judge Carmichael and Nancy Weaver introduced themselves as co-chairs of the Juvenile Justice and Cross System Youth Task Force. Nancy acknowledged all who participated as members of the task force and expressed the struggle in recruiting representation of developmental disabilities and asked for any connections members would have. Both Representative Summers and Senator Breaux recommended talking to Kim Dodson from The Arc. Judge Carmichael acknowledged the strategic goal the task force is associated with and the subsequent objectives. Judge Carmichael explained that each objective has a specific sub-committee tasked with focusing on advancing that specific section of the strategic goal. Speaking under objective #1, Judge Carmichael noted that each juvenile probation department in the state will have the opportunity for training in the Commercial Sexual Exploitation Committee (CSEC) training tool. Judge Carmichael explained that most victims of trafficking end up in the juvenile justice system. In relation to objective #2, Senator Breaux asked what a status offender is. Judge Carmichael explained that a status offender is a juvenile who commits a crime only a juvenile can commit. Judge Carmichael talked about objective #3 and its current activities. Representative Devon mentioned the 5 Star program in St. Joe County that facilitates juvenile offenders and their families through a curriculum where in the end, families are wanting to stay connected to others who they went through the program with. Judge Carmichael went on to overview objective #4. Nancy addressed additional activities happening outside of the subcommittees, specifically the Implementation Committee to follow up on what the barriers are to implementation of previously adopted recommendations. Nancy gave an example of recommendations getting assigned to DCS, and DCS having turnover in staff. Nancy mentioned the addition of a person with lived experience to the task force and how much of a benefit it has been for the whole group. Representative DeVon asked if children with mental health issues need to be handled in ways other than through the Department of Correction (DOC). Judge Carmichael answered that there are not a lot of local resources for children experiencing mental health issues and while the DOC is not the answer, the DOH does not have many resources either. Dr. Weaver offered support in connecting the task force with resources that public health workforce regarding objective #1.

Stephen Viehweg, representing the Mental Health and Substance Abuse task force, introduced himself and stated he will be sharing a proposal for a new subcommittee focusing on infant and toddler mental health. Stephen elaborated on the definition of infant mental health. Stephen talked about what good mental health and secure relationships can do for a child in terms of their long-term development. He emphasized the caregiver associated with the child and the barriers that prevent forming close relationships and vital skills needed for school and careers. Stephen stated that investment in early childhood mental health saves money from services down the road. He gave an overview of data points expressing the importance of why a focus on infant mental health is necessary to focus on. Stephen mentioned the previous and current efforts regarding Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) and what can be expanded upon to broaden those efforts like expanding projects and partnering with legislators. Senator Breaux asked if there is data on the benefits of reducing tendencies of teen pregnancy. Stephen answered that he would investigate research in supporting young parents and supporting their ongoing development.

## **7. Announcements and Adjournment**

### **Julia Stevens- Indiana Public Defender Council Announcement**

Julia spoke about the Public Defender Council partnering with the National Association of Counsel for Children to now being able to offer a child welfare law specialist program in Indiana, like elder law or family law programs. These programs will be offered and upon their completion, the Public Defender Council will return to provide updates regarding statistics and hopeful outcomes. Julia Stumler asked about the legal right to counsel for child welfare. Julia Stevens acknowledged that the public defender council is active in the conversation.

Senator Donato mentioned that this is her last meeting as chair of the Commission, and that she will be passing it to John Hammond.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m., motioned by Eric Miller and seconded by Senator Breaux.

**Next Meeting**

Monday, February 5, 2023, 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room A, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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