



Child Welfare Improvement Committee

INDIANA COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Meeting Minutes from January 23, 2026

The Child Welfare Improvement Committee (CWIC) met on January 23, 2026 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. The meeting took place over Zoom. At the designation of Chair Judge Tara Melton, Senior Judge Heather Mollo chaired the meeting.

Members Present:

The following members of the Committee were present:

- Judge Tara Melton, *Chair*
- Tatiana Alvarez, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Kelly Bray, Indiana Office of GAL/CASA, Indiana Office of Court Services
- Mag. Eleanor Finnell, Marion Circuit Court
- Hon. Geoffrey Gaither, Marion Superior Court
- Harmony Gist, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Hon. Kurt Grimm, DeKalb Circuit Court
- Mag. Matthew Gruett, Lake Superior Court
- Mag. Valorie Hahn, Hamilton Circuit and Superior Court
- Jarrod Hummer, Parent Advisor
- Haley Inman, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Joel McGormley, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Karen Mikosz, Department of Social Services, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi
- Michael Moore, Indiana Public Defender Council
- Hon. Leigh Morning, Rush Superior Court
- Mag. Joann Price, Lake Superior Court
- Kristina Rhodes, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Joseph Sims, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Gilbert Smith, Indiana Department of Child Services
- DeOnyae-Dior Valentina, Young Person Advisor

Staff and Guests Present:

Mindy Pickett, Jamie Devine, and Colleen Saylor from Indiana Office of Court Services, Senior Judge Heather Mollo, Julia Stevens from IPDC, Yvonne Moore from DCS

Welcome:

Senior Judge Mollo welcomed attendees.

Approval of Minutes from the November 21, 2025

Meeting:

Magistrate Price motioned to approve the minutes from the meeting on November 21, 2025. Harmony Gist seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by a majority vote with no votes in opposition.

PIP Update

Harmony Gist provided an update on the PIP, which is entering Q5 out of 8 quarters. DCS met with the feds yesterday to go over PIP progress. In total, the PIP included 83 activities to implement, and DCS has implemented/started all but 9. Indiana's PIP is one of the farthest along nationally. The remaining activities mainly involve training because DCS is going to overhaul cohort and other trainings and internal shifts have caused delays. The feds are pleased with Indiana's progress on the PIP. DCS will submit an official progress report to feds by the end of January. In terms of measuring progress, they are finishing measurement period 5, and have passed the majority of items. Remaining items include are related and include engagement with parents and understanding underlying needs to match with services. They will continue monitoring sustained progress on other activities.

The feds recently released Technical Bulletin #14 regarding the "A Home for Every Child" initiative, which significantly changes the CF SR and PIP process by piloting a PIP focused on achieving a 1:1 ratio of foster homes for children entering foster care. Right now, states may choose to "opt in" to the pilot or continue with their current PIP. For states that opt in, the pilot will focus on initiatives to increase the number of available foster homes and decrease the number of children entering or remaining in foster care. The feds are overhauling the CF SR process because no states have seen sustained improvements under the current model, and the pilot aligns with ACF's goals. Pilot states will begin a new PIP for at least a one-year period; under the current PIP, they are in the second year and have two remaining years of monitoring. Progress will not be tied to case review scores, but rather the successful completion of agreed-upon activities designed to achieve the 1:1 ratio. The financial penalty for failing to achieve measurement goals will be reduced for pilot states. It could be beneficial to opt in now since at some point, the new PIP will likely not be optional. DCS is still discussing internally how to proceed.

DCS Focused Needs Team

Yvonne Moore, DCS Focused Needs Director, gave a presentation on the services offered by the DCS' Focused Needs Team. The Focused Needs Team started in March 2020 and provides statewide support for field operations. The team consists of four staff members who cover the state. Focused needs areas include human trafficking (DCS Human Trafficking Response System), federal compliance for youth missing from care, ICWA, and support for international and cultural affairs.

The Human Trafficking Response System was developed in March 2020 with human trafficking-focused regional leads across the state, who receive quarterly advanced training on human trafficking and provide support to field staff. For any assessment that has indicators of human trafficking, field will consult with their human trafficking regional lead or the Focused Needs Team. DCS is rolling out two new screening tools on January 26, 2026; the human trafficking rapid indicator tool mirrors the juvenile probation tool in INCite. Any assessment is prompted and sent to workers that they need to complete it. There are two parts of the tool. Staff will also need to use the tool if a youth is missing and returns to care, which could occur at the beginning of the case or during the case. DCS has seen an increase in assessments substantiated from human trafficking, from 76 in January 2024 to 111 in January 2025.

DCS also has a lived expert working on youth missing from care due initiatives in order to negate negative connotations of runaways and to locate youth sooner. DCS is working to ensure active efforts to locate missing youth and appropriate documentation. If a youth is missing from care, DCS must notify law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which also has a child sex trafficking team DCS works closely with. DCS also partners with marshals and local law enforcement to locate youth missing from care. DCS is also developing push/pull factors on why youth go missing from care in order to reduce reoccurrences.

The Focused Needs Team assists field staff with ICWA compliance. The team works closely with the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, which has a tribe in South Bend. The team also assists with cases involving membership or eligibility for membership in tribes in other states. The team is working to educate DCS staff on understanding active efforts and ensuring tribal involvement in ICWA cases.

The Focused Needs Team also assists field staff with cases involving international and cultural affairs. DCS does not provide immigration assistance; if a minor in DCS care needs immigration services, they are referred to Child Advocates for services. Areas of assistance include cases involving a foreign-born parent or child, the team assists with notifying the consulate; cases necessitating overseas service abroad in accordance with the Hague Convention; and repatriating foreign-born minor (reunification abroad). DCS repatriated 10 youth last year. The team also assists with U.S. citizen children abroad who need to be repatriated to the U.S.

The team also offers interpreter and translation services through the language proficiency program through contracts with service providers. The contracted providers are available for telephone, virtual, or in-person interpretation services, as well as to translate important documents into parents' native language. Due to an increased need for ASL services, DCS has been working in the state to increase access to those services.

Court Performance Measures Update Workgroup Updates

Colleen Saylor presented a report on the FFY 2025 court performance measures.

The court performance measures were implemented in 2013 through Administrative Rule 1(F), which requires courts to report quarterly on their data. An INCite application pulls the data into a report provided courts enter the correct event codes. As part of the data validation process, CIP reviews reports each quarter, identifies validation errors, and sends documentation back to counties requesting that the errors be corrected and data resubmitted. Once validation is complete, CIP publishes the data to the public-facing dashboard. There is significant work done at both the county and state levels to review and validate the information, and CIP has confidence in the overall accuracy of the data. CIP collects and publishes updated data on a quarterly basis. Counties have 10 days after a quarter closes to submit data, though there is built in flexibility since the focus is on accuracy rather than speed.

CIP collects and publishes exit cohort data (when wardship terminates) to give a better picture of what happened over the life of a case. The data is not meant to be used as a report card, but rather to assist counties in identifying pinch points. CIP uses median time to permanency in alignment with the Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases Technical Guide, commonly known as “The Toolkit”. This research recommends using the median because some cases take longer to resolve when it is in the child’s best interest. CIP also publishes measures in the average at the feds’ request. It is important to also look at the number of cases in each county, as it is very different to have a long median time to permanency in a county that closed 200 CHINS cases versus a county that had one case that took a long time to close because it was in the child’s best interest.

For FFY 2025, 61% of cases closed in reunification and 25% closed in adoption. The median time to permanency was 470 days. The mediation time to adoption was reduced by 9% from 951 days in FFY 2024 to 868 days in FFY 2025. For FFY 2025, Indiana’s median time to reunification was 359 days, which was below the national standard of 365 days for reunification (which was set by the CFSR and the feds) for the first time since 2016. CIP updated Chief Justice Rush on the improvements and she was pleased with Indiana’s progress.

The dashboard has features designed to improve functionality and the user experience. Definitions were added to the detail tooltip allowing users to hover over the measure and access the definition to better understand the metrics they are reviewing. Users can also filter the data by year, county, and wardship termination type. Specific tabs include data filtered by permanency and by county-level snapshot.

The publicly facing dashboard is available at <https://www.in.gov/courts/iocs/cip/welfare>. CIP staff are available to answer questions about the dashboard or to receive input from users on what would be beneficial while using the dashboard. The dashboard is meant to be used as a tool for conversations to help drive data-based decisions.

CWIC Collaboration Workgroup

The CWIC Collaboration Workgroup reported that they have been very active following a break for the holidays. The workgroup’s first project is underway—they are in the process of developing a Community Stakeholder Meeting Toolkit. DCS is working with Casey Family Programs on a similar project, and the workgroup plans to invite the DCS staff member to a future meeting to discuss what it will look like so the workgroup does not recreate the wheel. The workgroup has met with two

counties that developed collaborative stakeholder meetings through the PIP to get their input on what is working, what isn't, and what they would recommend the workgroup include in the toolkit. The workgroup is also considering their second project to start on after the toolkit is complete. The workgroup meets every other week to keep the project on track and moving forward. Overall, the goal is to provide child welfare leaders in each county with a toolkit to be able to put together an effective community stakeholder meeting. The workgroup will design the toolkit to provide some structure while leaving room for autonomy for each community to identify their own needs and develop what will work for them; they envision a menu for stakeholders to choose what works best for their needs. The workgroup is in the phase of building the toolkit. The workgroup identified that strong support from judicial officers is key to the success of local stakeholder collaborative meetings.

CWIC Communication Workgroup

The CWIC Communication Workgroup reported that they recently had their first meeting. The workgroup discussed that some jurisdictions are utilizing the Your Case Plan app, which was developed by a foster parent. It provides a single place for communications between parties and parents. The app's features include an education center/information center component; can have reminders for upcoming meetings/scheduling/court hearings; parents can create a to-do list. Utilizing the app could potentially reduce delays when there are changes to parents' phones. However, a judicial officer already inquired about whether they could receive a CIP grant to utilize the app, and it was not possible due to concerns from tech about confidentiality. There is a recent federal order regarding technology that DCS is aware of, and they are looking at potential apps with similar functionality. It was suggested the court's tech team could attend a future workgroup meeting or meet with DCS to keep each branch in the loop of technological developments. Given all the barriers, the workgroup is trying to decide how far to pursue this potential project.

The workgroup discussed inquiring with stakeholders regarding what communication tools they are using, for example, advisement of rights, information sheets for parents to understand their roles/responsibilities, whether they are utilizing youth or foster parent reports, whether courts are creating lists of tasks to prioritize what a parent needs to follow up on after review and permanency hearings, what courts are utilizing to improve youth engagement in court and foster parent engagement, whether information about pre-adjudication participation in services is being shared outside of just the initial hearing, and which resources Public Defenders are sharing with parents. The workgroup developed a draft stakeholder survey for review and approval; if approved, they hope to send it to stakeholders and use the results to drive the discussion about specific projects going forward. For now, the workgroup plans to meet monthly, but may meet more frequently if the need arises.

Member updates:

Committee members discussed the possibility of developing an app, noting that it probably falls beyond the scope of CWIC due to the number of agencies that would have to be involved. Members noted that other states have similar information sharing tools and that having a space for consistent communication with parents could significantly impact case resolution, including improved time to permanency. For example, service providers often do not have parents' current

phone numbers, which causes delays. Some states have participated in “hack-a-thons” which would allow groups to focus on the exploration and development of potential apps.

IPDC plans to make a parent-focused training video to walk them through various processes and hopes to identify a parent with lived experience who would be willing to serve as the avatar for the videos.

Wrap-Up /Closing:

Meeting adjourned.

Next Meetings:

March 20, 2026 from 9:00 AM-11:00 AM ET via Zoom

May 15, 2026 from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM ET In-Person, Fuse West Conference Room, 2nd Floor of the South Tower of the Capital Center, 201 N. Illinois St., Indianapolis, IN 46204 (hybrid option TBD)