
Illinois Children and Family Services Advisory Council

September 9, 2021 from 3:00 to 5:00 PM

Via WebEx / Conference line only

DRAFT MINUTES

Attendance

Members: Marge Berglind, Anita Weinberg, Nate Pietrini*, Jennifer Hansen, Lanetta Haynes Turner, Brittani Kindle

DCFS: Helena Buckner, Kara Hamilton, Lucretia Newman

Youth Advisory Board (YAB) Members: Gabriel Foley

Public: Tanya Gassenheimer from Shriver Center, Kim King (pending member), Joshua Travis (pending member)

Agenda

I. Welcome and Introductions

Marge called meeting to order 3:02pm.

II. Presentation :Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Taskforce

Tanya Gassenheimer, Shriver center.

• Discussion of Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Task Force (HB321)

- i. What is bringing families in system, what is keeping them there, and effects even after exit
- ii. Established for 1 year, hoping to start November 2021
- iii. 32 members- legislators, state agencies, advocates, former foster youth/parents impacted
- iv. Shriver Center Co-Chairing with ICOY, DCFS Admin Support and data
- v. Meetings open and encourage collaboration
- vi. Looking at system chronologically- points of entry in system, what investigation/court process, what services look like, looking at family first legislation and beyond. Looking at issues after youth leave system, state central registry and re-entry.

Questions/Comments/concerns from the Council:

Q. What concerns drove this legislation/task force? Per Tanya, concern of impact of system involvement and harms, data shows negative impact for children/parents. Think how we can give resources/supports without bringing these layers of harm.

Q. Looking at fact sheet Tanya sent out- in 2018 65% of cases due to allegations of neglect, do we know what % of allegations ended up in system? Per Tanya, have to check on data but even in the process of following up on allegations or before a finding, this investigation phase can cause a lot of harm even if unfounded and closed case.

Marge: IL has had has on books that children can't be placed solely on neglect or poverty, interested to see what cases are referencing and if resources aren't being used. Mandated reporters seem to be hesitant to report. Mandated reporters not understanding child welfare system.

Q. is there an overall timeline for recruitment and implementation? Per Tanya, Governor signed at end of August, Governor has 60 days for appointments as well as state agencies, and first meeting 90 days after signing.

Q. Is there a limit of people on task force? Per Tanya, 32 members.

Q. The YAB has heard the impact on separation maximized with COVID. Was there any unique COVID takeaway your team had that will impact direction of this taskforce? Per Tanya, our focus during pandemic was the ban on visits between parents/children so we were challenging that and pushing for contact while maintaining health precautions. Push for visits as 'necessities' as the impact on children and families was observed; the pandemic exposed and magnified the underlying issues.

Q. Anita Weinberg assisted with advocating for the legislation and noted they are very excited that this will engage legislators about issues/concerns and ways to respond.

Q. Marge asked Tanya for questions she had about the council. Tanya asked if they see a way that we can all be better in conversation and how the taskforce can help their work. Gabriel noted that youth involvement is important, so good to see you are including.

Marge suggested the council ask Tanya back in January/February to provide an update. The council members agreed we would be happy to help provide any information, and serve as a resource.

Marge thanked Tanya for joining and wished success for the new taskforce.

III. **Approval of Minutes from July 8th**

MOTION: On a motion by Jennifer Hansen moved seconded by Lanetta Haynes Turner, minutes were unanimously approved as submitted.

IV. **Membership Review**

Update:

Kara reported the Governor's office is still working on pending members and is asking for additional information for some. Nate Pietrini approved, Kim King, Joshua Travis, and Gabriel Foley pending.

Candidate Interview

Marge introduced Nicholas Martin, who has applied for membership on the council. The Nominating Committee interviewed Mr. Martin and recommended the full membership also meet with him.

Nick:

- i. From Highland IL, served pastorally in Anna IL.
- ii. Associate pastor, seeing growing foster parent support group

Questions/comments/concerns from the council:

- Q. Which private agency are you licensed through as a foster parent? Nick responded, Children's Home and Aid, borrowed home.
- Q. Did becoming a foster parent influence your decision to want to join this council? Nick responded that they are not disconnected. Becoming more connected with foster parents, case

workers, etc. we have seen a great need for what this council does. Negative notations on “the system” so began to think what could be done for better trust/cooperation in system and positive change in policy/procedure.

- Q. Being from southern Illinois, do you think there are issues unique to the area? Nick responded, absolutely, ravaging effect of opioid crisis south of Carbondale specifically, huge issue affecting kids. Family First a big reason for involvement and thinks it important. Have seen lots of families impacted- drugs, alcohol, lack of economic opportunity.
- Q. I worked at Children’s Home and Aid for a bit, what have you seen in the lack of resources down state that would give you good perspective? Nick state he hopes to bring real life interaction. Amount of disruptions in foster care system. Current placement has had multiple homes, issues of needing specialized care and resources/information wasn’t made available to ensure proper placement. Residential treatment for trafficking, working with DCFS to provide minors with care.

Marge thanked Nick for joining and let him know will be in contact.

After discussion the council agreed to recommend Nick for membership.

MOTION: On a motion by Jennifer Hanson and seconded by Gabriel, the council recommended Nicholas Martin for membership. This recommendation will go to DCFS and the Governor’s office.

The council further discussed how to increase membership. There are 8-9 vacancies that can be filled. The group suggested looking at NAMI or Mexican American legal fund as sources.

**V. Member Discussion on Pandemic Impact on Child Welfare System
DCFS staff were unable to join the council for today’s meeting.**

Marge noted she put together a document as a guide for DCFS staff to discuss COVID issues. This is a document that reflects previous questions raised in the last few meeting. The council further discussed this document and suggested additional areas for discussion with DCFS:

Can we pull numbers of youth that returned to care? The number that declined the option to return? If we go back to shutdown, what is plan? What would be done different?

- How would we solve the issue of visits with kids if lockdown again?
- The option to remain in care or come back, didn’t do good job publicizing it so what would be done different and also what happened to them going forward and will they extend?
- How many kids 12+ getting vaccinated and their foster families. Tracking vaccines.
- Increased numbers of therapy and therapists not able to keep up, has DCFS increased counselling services available for youth in care?
- Youth were not hearing from caseworkers and ILOs? Concern YAB heard a lot. YAB drafted a bill to restructure how ILOs speak with youth, status? Helena let them know we will look into it.

Council members suggested that this is an important issue that shouldn’t be delayed for 2 months. They agreed to hold a special October meeting to focus on the pandemic/COVID issues. Marge will update the discussion document with today’s additions.

Marge asked if Kara was aware of Family First federal legislation and why DCFS didn’t ask ICFSAC wasn’t pulled for survey. Kara stated she would have to check. Let’s put that on the next agenda item.

VI. Plan Agenda for November Meeting

Follow-Up on Sex Offender Registry issues and progress of Juvenile Justice Commission progress.

Review of Family First Act and DCFS' Plan for Implementation

Follow-Up from SPIDER and Subsidized Guardianship discussions

Kim King noted the waitlist for placements is over the top right now. Marge added that there was a recent legislative hearing focusing on DCFS kids sleeping in offices, and the use welcome centers with kids staying 24/7 but not going to school. House members were concerned and asked DCFS to come up with plans on how to open placements, lack of specialized placements. Marge commented Illinois is not the only state with this problem, think it's time for rethinking of child welfare system. For purposes of discussion with this council, it would be helpful to get a refresher from DCFS on what other groups are working on these issues.

VII. Meeting Adjourned

MOTION: On a motion by Jennifer Hanson and seconded by Anita Weinberg the council agreed to adjourned.

Meeting ended 4:46pm

