



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana
Wednesday, April 17th, 2024
Indiana Government Center South

- Christine Blessinger, Department of Correction, 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
- 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
- Joseph Habig, Director, State Budget Agency
- Brooke Huntington (non-voting member for Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary, Indiana Department 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 & Introductions

John Hammond called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: To approve the [minutes from the February meeting](#), was motioned by Jay Chaudhary, seconded by Bernice Corley, and approved unanimously 13-0.

3. Bullying and Suicide Prevention

Michelle Bulington, Bethany Goetz, & Lucia Mercado

The presentation can be found on slides 4-18 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Michelle, Bethany, and Lucia introduced themselves and started off the presentation by emphasizing how social media plays a role in youth mental health. Michelle highlighted that 40% of youth ages 8-12 have a social media account, while most social media age minimums are 13. Michelle stated that the Surgeon General's report found that social media has both

positive and negative impacts on youth. Some negatives include poor sleep quality, impacts on already marginalized communities, and risk-taking behaviors. Michelle noted positive impacts include community connections, especially among those in marginalized communities, and the access and reinforcement of help-seeking behaviors for mental health. Michelle defined cyberbullying as “the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person, which contributes to bullying related depression, body image, disordered eating, and poor sleep quality.” Cyberbullying can be perpetrated through online threats, posts, texts, comments, posting an individual’s personal information, pictures, videos, in an unwanted manner to target or harass someone. Michelle elaborated that some extreme, harmful, or inappropriate content like suicide content, risk taking challenges or self-harm behavior has been linked to youth deaths. Michelle explained that over exposure to suicide content, or what they call “suicide contagion,” normalizes the behavior and increases the risk of suicide. She highlighted the results regarding stress, anxiety, depression & suicide from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey and active prevention and intervention initiatives through the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant Program. Bethany spoke about youth bullying data points and noted that reports have decreased since 2014. She described details of the youth prevention efforts at the Division of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA) and their roots in youth’s risk and protective factors. She also described the efforts and opportunities of the State and the CISC task force and shared national bullying prevention resources. Lucia noted she will be sharing perspectives and experiences from her life as they relate to social media. Lucia shared the social media platforms she had and at what age she got them, and that her mom enforced strict boundaries around social media. Lucia shared benefits she experiences through social media like connectedness, learning, and memory keeping. She elaborated on the negative impacts she or her friends have experienced, including struggles with body image and disordered eating, mental health, suicide, shame, and bullying. Lucia further described inescapable bullying she and others receive through social media. She mentioned being engaged by predators assuming younger identities or receiving unsolicited images from men. Lucia described the hate messages she would receive, and that even though she could block them, she was still afraid of the repercussions of blocking someone. She highlighted that through mass media, things like teen dating violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, gun violence and suicide are normalized, and youth become desensitized to the harm and danger. Lucia requested the Commission members to engage with youth from diverse backgrounds, to provide opportunities and help change the image of youth in Indiana.

Discussion: Representative DeVon asked Lucia what age she got her first phone and if she could have it in school. Lucia replied she had an iPad with the same capabilities before she got her first smartphone in 7th grade. She also said that the school had a rule about no phones but that students had them anyway. Bernice Corley asked Bethany if she thought the statutory definition of bullying is sufficient, given the opportunities for individuals outside of the school to bully. Bethany answered that it is possible the definition could be assessed and updated, like how other programs provide fidelity monitoring. Bernice also asked about how well 988 is as a sustained track for students in terms of grant funding. Bethany responded that while the 988 funding is federal and the infrastructure associated with it will take time to continue to roll out, she feels it is well supported, to which Jay Chaudhary agreed. Representative DeVon mentioned a lack of reporting of bullying from school systems and questioned whether the State is overburdening the schools and the accuracy of the suicide data. Bethany acknowledged that suicide is underreported for numerous reasons, including coroners avoiding labels and being underpaid and undertrained. Chris Naylor asked if there are any programs for families who chose to not expose their children to social media. Jay said that in May’s Behavioral Health Commission meeting, a group of parents who chose this route for their children will be presenting their findings and challenges in addressing the social pressure children face to be on social media. Aly asked if the DOE’s reporting of total bullying instances was derived from disciplinary reports or self-reports to which Michelle replied that they are all from the schools, as they are required to report bullying instances by law. John Hammond thanked Bethany, Michelle and Lucia for their work and the powerful presentation they provided to the Commission. Mark Fairchild shared an update on the creation of a new task force involving these topics directly.

Action: To approve creation of a bullying and suicide prevention task force, was motioned by Christine Blessinger seconded by Representative DeVon, and approved unanimously 13-0.

4. Indiana Youth Services Association & Safe Place

David Westenberger & Robin Donaldson

The presentation can be found on slides 20-46 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). David started by thanking FSSA and shared that the Indiana Youth Services Association works on the same issues, but at a community level. He shared the various education opportunities and partnerships within the state, and that IYSA is working to create self-sustaining coalitions to carry out the work. IYSA is using social media to promote the Indiana Lifeline Law, events, and create awareness on making safe decisions. Another program IYSA promotes is The Journey, which is a fellowship program for youth workers where they can connect and learn. David highlighted the ACES coalition, tasked with training youth workers on ACEs, trauma, and resilience. He mentioned the Child and Youth Care Certification board that helps provide skill development and certification in youth-related competencies. David also mentioned IYSA's efforts to promote youth worker wellbeing, which connects youth workers to tele-medicine/therapy, grant opportunities to promote wellbeing. The primary program IYSA oversees is Youth Services Bureau (YSBs). YSBs exist in 60 counties in Indiana as community organizations that assess and meet the needs of local young people. Robin touched on the YSB Four Core Roles and how they promote positive youth development. She then shared the outcomes for school interventions and outcomes in case management/truancy prevention, highlighting a decrease in risk factors and increase protective factors. The role of a positive adult and/or peer mentoring connections were key pieces to these outcomes. Robin mentioned that through teen court, teens are not recidivating and are more equipped with life skills that help with decision making. Robin discussed Safe Place Prevention Programming, which emphasizes early intervention. Safe Place sites include businesses and public locations equipped and trained to provide intervention services to youth in crisis. Safe Place referrals can happen through schools, a child entering a Safe Place site, or texting the text-for-support service which is available to kids whose counties do not have a Safe Place site. Robin then played a video about an example of how Safe Place intervened with a youth with suicidal ideation. She included a list of reasons why youth were using Safe Place sites, with suicidal ideation as the leading cause. She shared that 80% of youth are connected to resources to mental health, housing, and other supports which helps keep them out of the justice or welfare system. David closed with providing areas of opportunities for IYSA, YSB, and Safe Places. He emphasized that prevention services help make an impact on reactive systems.

Discussion: Dr. Weaver shared that local health departments who opt for Health First Indiana Funding are tasked with trauma and injury prevention, which she believes can align well with IYSA and YSB's work and goals. Representative DeVon asked the youngest age youth typically to reach out to Safe Place sites, to which David responded 13 or 14 years old. Representative DeVon followed up by asking when staff know when DCS needs to be involved. David responded that all Hoosiers are mandated reporters, but not everyone knows what necessitates reporting. Safe Place staff are trained to know what necessitates reporting, and that it is not discretionary. Julia shared that she aged out of foster care, and that when she saw Safe Place signs as a youth and now as a young adult, those signs inspired hope in her. She also shared that she encourages her peers to know where their closest Safe Place is for when they would need it.

5. Executive Director Updates

Mark Fairchild

The presentation can be found on slides 48-51 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Mark shared that all bills listed in the agenda were bills that the Commission interacted with. Action included either testimony, letters of support, or engaging with legislators. He mentioned that bills regarding human trafficking will return next year. Mark said he felt this session was successful in regards to legislative engagement. Mark noted that because there were questions surrounding the GAL/CASA programs and procedures, the Director of those programs will be presenting at the August meeting to provide information and the areas of support they need. Mark also shared that there were specific bills regarding online safety and digital well-being circulating. He shared that while online safety is written in the Commission's enabling legislation, it is not being studied in any task force. Mark requested this topic be assigned to the newly enacted suicide and bullying prevention task force, as those topics heavily intersect.

Action: To assign online safety to the suicide and bullying prevention task force was motioned by Bernice Corley, seconded by Dr. Weaver, and approved unanimously, 13-0.

Mark moved to discuss truancy and chronic absenteeism prevention and the communicated need for support from communities and schools. Mark asked the Commission to allow assigning truancy and chronic absenteeism to the Juvenile Justice Task Force's subcommittee focusing on status offenses. He plans to support this with the work being done through the Youth Justice Oversight Committee that also focuses on diversion.

Action: To assign truancy prevention and chronic absenteeism to the Juvenile Justice and Cross System Youth and Youth Justice Oversight Committee was motioned by Senator Donato, seconded by Christine Blessinger, and approved unanimously, 13-0.

Mark recapped the Day of the Child as a day of success with both Monroe County Commission on Youth (MCCOY), Indiana Youth Institute (IYI), and roughly 500 youth and their youth workers in the statehouse. He shared that next year, there will be a two-day event where youth and youth advocates will receive information, training, and opportunities on advocacy and involvement. Mark closed by acknowledging the passing of Senator and Commission Member Jean Breaux, and through the inspiration of her determination and collaborative spirit, the Commission's internship will be renamed the Senator Jean Breaux Collaboration Fellowship.

6. Commission Member Announcements & Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:54 a.m.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, June 18th, 2024, 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.