



Nebraska Children's Commission
1225 L Street, Suite 401
Lincoln, NE 68508

August 28, 2025

Brandon Metzler, Clerk of the Legislature
State Capitol, Room 2018
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Mr. Metzler,

Neb. Rev. Stat. [§43-4207](#) requires the Nebraska Children's Commission to provide a written report regarding its activities during the year to the Governor and the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature by September 1st of each year.

The attached report provides the progress that has been made from July 2024 through June 2025. The report was reviewed and approved by the Nebraska Children's Commission at the August 7, 2025 Commission Meeting.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Melissa Nance, Chair
Nebraska Children's Commission

Enclosure:
Nebraska Children's Commission Report 2024-2025 (Final)



2024-2025

NEBRASKA CHILDREN'S COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

Recommendations to the Governor and the Health &
Human Services Committee of the Legislature

Submitted Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-4207



(402) 890-6510

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1225 L St., Suite 401
Lincoln, NE 68508



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INTRODUCTION

The Nebraska Children's Commission was established by the Nebraska State Legislature in 2012 to serve as a leadership forum for collaboration on child welfare and juvenile justice reform. The Commission brings together representatives from all three branches of government, as well as public and private stakeholders from across the state, including regional and community members.

The organizational structure includes 26 members, both voting and non-voting, an executive committee, a chairperson and several statutory committees and Workgroups. Members are appointed to ensure balanced representation from government, system stakeholders, community representatives, and families and youth with lived experience in child welfare and juvenile justice.

More than 250 stakeholders and community members participate in the Commission's initiatives, which have a significant impact on policy and legislation affecting children and families in Nebraska. This year, the Nebraska Legislature enacted LB346, a measure designed to streamline state government and make the most of limited resources. LB346 consolidates advisory structures to ensure that every available resource is directed toward achieving the greatest possible benefit for Nebraska's children and families.

Under this bill, the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee and the Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee are among the advisory groups being sunset. The functions, oversight and reporting responsibilities previously managed by these committees will be absorbed into existing agency operations and the Commission's broader advisory activities.

The Commission and state agencies will continue to engage stakeholders, monitor outcomes and provide input on foster care reimbursement and the Bridge to Independence Program through integrated processes and ongoing partnerships.

The Nebraska Children's Commission Annual Report provides a summary of the work accomplished each year by its statutory committees. For more detailed annual reports, please visit: childrens.nebraska.gov/publications.html

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Over the past year, the Nebraska Children’s Commission has continued to advance its mission by convening statutory committees, workgroups, and over 250 engaged stakeholders across government, community organizations, and families. This collective commitment has driven data-informed and equity-focused reforms in the state’s child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Amid legislative changes, including the absorption of the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee and Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee under the NCC, we have focused on ensuring seamless oversight, evaluation, and policy guidance. These changes streamline governance while maintaining a robust, unified approach to supporting children and youth.

The NCC’s initiatives have including analyzing youth progress in the B2i program, advocating for expanded service access regardless of immigration status, elevating efforts to address racial and ethnic disparities through the new “One Nebraska Workgroup”, and piloting innovative models to improve access for high-needs youth. Priority has also been placed on preventing trafficking and normalizing youth experiences in care.

To provide clarity and focus, recommendations for the year are organized around two strategic priorities: **Service Array & Access**, which is aimed at expanding and improving supports for families and youth; and **System Stability & Oversight**, aimed at strong accountability, facility governance, and absorption of advisory functions for more integrated operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY COMMITTEE

The Commission is required to provide a written report to include recommendations regarding child welfare priorities and progress towards addressing those priorities. Below are the identified recommendations from each committee within the Commission, which strategic priority intended to be addressed, and the page number to the committee summary supporting the recommendation.

Juvenile Services Committee Recommendations:	Strategic Priority	Page # of Report
Creation of a <i>One Nebraska</i> Workgroup	Service Array and Access	Page 6
Pilot a bundled funding model for high-needs youth, including Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF) waiver services	Service Array and Access	Page 7
Completing facility visitations and supporting increased transition planning centered on the family	System Stability and Oversight	Page 10
Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Recommendations:	Strategic Priority	Page # of Report
Improve understanding of eligibility and access	Service Array and Access	Page 13
Establish clear self-sufficiency milestones	Service Array and Access	Page 13
Address barriers related to sealed juvenile court cases	Service Array and Access	Page 13
Recognize leadership and interest exploration as participation hours	Service Array and Access	Page 14

Bridge to Independence Advisory Committee Recommendations:	Strategic Priority	Page # of Report
Strengthening community-based support networks	Service Array and Access	Page 14
Establish clear self-sufficiency milestones for program participants	Service Array and Access	Page 14
Address barriers related to sealed juvenile court cases that impact tribal youth access	Service Array and Access	Page 14
Continue efforts to expand Bridge to Independence program eligibility to all youth, regardless of citizenship status	Service Array and Access	Page 15
Strengthening Families Act Recommendations:	Strategic Priority	Page # of Report
Prioritize coalition building with tribal government and community leaders as a core anti-trafficking strategy	Service Array and Access	Page 17
Creation of <i>Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement</i> (APPLA) Workgroup	Service Array and Access	Page 19

JUVENILE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Nick Juliano & Deb VanDyke-Ries, Co-Chairs

Deb VanDyke-Ries (Nebraska Court Improvement Project) and Nick Juliano (RADIUS) serve as the co-chairs for the Juvenile Services Committee (JSC).

This joint annual report reflects the continuing commitment of the JSC and NCJJ to juvenile justice reform. It is submitted in accordance with state statute and highlights a collaborative and inclusive process that prioritizes the needs and voices of Nebraska's youth and families.

This year marks a pivotal moment in the committee's work on equity and access within the juvenile justice system. In January 2025, the Racial and Ethnic Disparities (R/ED) Workgroup initiated a significant shift in direction. Recognizing the value of uniting marginalized groups to amplify collective impact, the group proposed broadening its focus to include additional populations and renaming itself the *One Nebraska* Workgroup. This transition centers lived experience and is designed to foster greater cross-support and collaboration among Workgroups and committees.

Reducing disparities in Nebraska's juvenile justice system remains a central goal. Over the past year, the Workgroup has emphasized supporting smaller agencies with deep expertise in their respective communities and cultural contexts. Accordingly, the committee recommends formally transitioning to a One Nebraska Workgroup. By bringing together the voices and experiences of all marginalized groups, this broader and more inclusive approach aims to promote collaboration, shared learning, and mutual support—ultimately improving outcomes for Nebraska's youth and families.

Additionally, the Access to Treatment Workgroup continues to address barriers to timely, clinically indicated treatment for youth with complex needs. Over the past year, the Workgroup has focused on funding, service coordination, and accountability, with the goal of ensuring equitable access to a complete continuum of care. A key recommendation from this group is to pilot a bundled funding model for high-needs youth, aiming to streamline access and improve outcomes statewide.

RACIAL & ETHNIC DISPARITIES WORKGROUP

Tami Soper, Chair

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities (R/ED) Workgroup has not convened since January 2025. At its last meeting, the group discussed a major shift in direction, including:

- **Expanding Focus:** Proposing to broaden its scope to include additional marginalized populations and adopt the name *One Nebraska Workgroup*, with a focus on centering lived experience.
- **Strength in Numbers:** Recognizing the benefits of uniting all marginalized groups to amplify collective impact.
- **Cross-Group Collaboration:** Agreeing that a broader approach would facilitate greater cross-support among Workgroups and committees.

Efforts to reduce disparities continue to hinge on access to culturally competent providers for families. Throughout the year, the Workgroup has prioritized supporting and elevating smaller agencies across Nebraska that possess deep expertise in their specific communities and cultural contexts. The group recognizes that culturally competent language and services are often critical to success but remain difficult for families to access.

The committee highlights four key aspects regarding the value of diversity in service provision:

- **Diversity among Providers:** Diversity enhances the service array by making culturally responsive approaches possible, approaches that might be overlooked by state agencies.
- **Community Reflection:** Agencies that reflect the communities they serve can adapt more effectively within the relevant cultural values, which may not be considered by larger, more generalized systems.
- **Adapting Strategies:** While resources frequently targeted larger populations, smaller cultural groups often face similar challenges. Successful strategies for one group can often be adapted to serve others.
- **Embedded Partnerships:** Partnering with agencies within these communities promotes more positive outcomes, as these organizations are more attuned to the unique needs and strengths of their populations.

Given these considerations, the committee **recommends moving forward with the reestablishment of a *One Nebraska Workgroup* to enable a broader, more inclusive advocacy effort.** By combining the voices and experiences of all marginalized groups, the group aims to promote greater collaboration, shared learning, and cross-support among workgroups and committees - ultimately improving outcomes for Nebraska's youth and families.

ACCESS TO SERVICES WORKGROUP

Julie Smith, Chair

Formed in 2022, the Access to Services Workgroup brings together community experts to examine challenges, identify underlying issues, and develop actionable steps to improve timely access to clinically indicated treatment. Over the past year, the Workgroup has focused on the intersection of funding, service coordination, and accountability, all with the goal of supporting youth with complex needs and promoting equitable access to a full continuum of care.

The Workgroup has identified a strong potential solution to barriers affecting access to treatment:

Pilot a Bundled Funding Model for High-Needs Youth, including Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF) waiver services

Nebraska's current funding mechanisms for youth behavioral health services, particularly for PRTFs, create incentives for providers to serve lower-needs youth while youth with high medical and psychiatric complexity are left with limited options to meet their treatment needs. The system's reliance on fee-for-service and fragmented rate structures contributes to a "pick and choose" mentality, leaving the most vulnerable youth underserved and driving up costs for probation and state agencies as they strive to develop alternatives that will meet the complex needs of today's youth.

Overreliance on institutional settings in the current continuum fails to provide essential elements such as individualized care, parental support and skill development, and community integration opportunities. This has been a longstanding concern for policymakers, funders, regulators, and advocates, who have observed that, in many cases, the risks outweigh the benefits.

ACCESS TO SERVICES WORKGROUP

The proposed model aims to address both challenges by providing individualized, community-integrated treatment options, accessible even for the highest-risk, highest-needs youth.

Launching a pilot program will allow for testing a split-rate funding mechanism for PRTF waiver services. This separates the daily room-and-board rate from the services rate with the long-term goal of moving to an all-inclusive bundled payment. This model should be developed in collaboration with Nebraska Medicaid, the Managed Care Organizations (MCO's), the Administrative Office of Courts and Probation, the Department of Health and Human services, and other vested interests as an alternative option to meet the treatment needs of youth.

The pilot should include:

- A cost analysis comparing bundled versus fee-for-service models, with specific attention to the cost-effectiveness and quality of outcomes for youth with complex psychiatric and medical needs,
- Outcome tracking and data collection aligned with the Community-Based Juvenile Services Aid Program's common data set requirements (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-2404.02), and,
- Engagement of Medicaid in the design and evaluation phases, including a detailed breakdown of Medicaid and non-Medicaid costs associated with bundled services

CONTINUUM OF CARE WORKGROUP

Tammy Sassaman, Chair

In October 2023, the YRTC Workgroup was officially renamed the Continuum of Care Workgroup. Originally, this Workgroup was established to conduct a comprehensive review of the statutory responsibilities related to Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTCs) and to evaluate the five-year operations plan submitted to the Legislature in accordance with Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 43-427. The Workgroup focuses on three primary areas:

Youth Voice

Family Engagement

Accreditation

Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 43-4203(b), the Juvenile Services Committee is tasked to, “review the role and effectiveness of out-of-home placements utilized in the juvenile justice system, including the youth rehabilitation and treatment centers, and make recommendations to the Commission on the juvenile justice continuum of care, including what populations should be served in out-of-home placements and what treatment services should be provided at the centers in order to appropriately serve those populations.” To align with these statutory requirements, the Workgroup has focused on examining YRTCs throughout Nebraska and their treatment services to better understand their current status and needs. The group will continue monitoring YRTCs and other juvenile justice facilities, developing recommendations as findings emerge.

The Continuum of Care Workgroup has been conducting site visits to juvenile facilities statewide, providing direct assessment of living environments, services, and support provided to youth. These visits allow the Workgroup to engage with staff and youth, gain firsthand insights into daily experiences, monitor compliance with standards, and identify both strengths and areas for improvement. Such site reviews are integral to the Workgroup’s commitment to accountability and ongoing improvement in care.

A consistent concern raised through visits and stakeholder feedback is the environment to which youth return after release. Many youths return to communities and homes that lack support structures or may present risks that contributed to their system involvement.

CONTINUUM OF CARE WORKGROUP

The Workgroup acknowledges that successful re-entry depends not only on preparation within the facility but also on the availability of a safe, stable, and nurturing placements, as well as ongoing educational, mental health, and vocational supports. To address these concerns and promote positive outcomes for transitioning youth from care, the Workgroup recommends:

Completing Facility Visitations

The Workgroup recommends the completion of all remaining scheduled visits to juvenile facilities across the state. These visits enable members to directly observe living conditions, service delivery, and the support available to youth preparing for transition. By engaging with facility staff, youth, and service providers, the Workgroup can assess adherence to best practices, identify facility-specific strengths, and surface areas for improvement. Insights gathered from these site visits will ensure that recommendations are grounded in an up-to-date, firsthand understanding of statewide facility environments. Regular and comprehensive facility review fosters accountability, informs policy development, and promotes consistency in quality of care.

Beyond observations, documenting and analyzing patterns observed across facilities will allow for systemic improvements in Nebraska's continuum of care. The Workgroup will use data and feedback from these visits to refine operational standards, guide technical assistance, and shape future training initiatives. Completing these visits closes gaps in oversight and ensures that Nebraska's approach to juvenile care and transition remains responsive, adaptive, and evidence based.

Increased transition planning centered on the family

Transition planning must be a holistic, family-centered process that starts well before a youth discharges. The Workgroup recommends early, proactive engagement with families to ensure they play an active role in transition planning. This includes providing family-specific supports such as readiness workshops, individualized case planning sessions, and connections to community resources addressing behavioral, educational, and social reintegration needs. Partnering with families from the outset customizes re-entry to address their unique strengths and challenges, increasing the likelihood of a stable, successful transition. The Workgroup also urges investment in follow-up and aftercare measures to support parents and caregiver's post-reunification.

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Richard Hasty, Chair

The Bridge to Independence (B2i) Advisory Committee was established pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4513 to provide recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Nebraska Children’s Commission regarding the B2i Program, extended guardianship, and extended adoption assistance.

The B2i Program, implemented in October 2014, supports youth aging out of the child welfare foster care system without achieving permanency. In 2021, the program expanded to include youth aging out of the tribal court system. In 2023, Senator Dungan introduced LB14, which requires that youth in the juvenile justice system who are in a court-ordered out-of-home placement on their 19th birthday receive information about the B2i Program. LB14 was subsequently amended into LB50 through AM1980, mandating DHHS implementation by January 1, 2025. This legislative progress reflects a longstanding recommendation of the Committee, whose members remain dedicated to ensuring that B2i is accessible to all youth in out-of-home placement as they transition into adulthood.

Recognizing the importance of inclusivity, the Committee continues to prioritize B2i services for all eligible youth, regardless of immigration status. To further this goal, the Committee established the Immigration Workgroup, chaired by Felipe Longoria-Shinn, to identify and address barriers faced by immigrant youth, and remains committed to developing actionable recommendations and advancing equitable access in future legislative sessions. The Sustainability Workgroup, also chaired by Felipe Longoria-Shinn, is focused on defining what sustainability means for young people leaving the B2i Program.

The Data Collection & Evaluation Workgroup, chaired by Heather Wood, prioritizes efforts to better understand and address barriers to the B2i Program. This year, the Workgroup recommended a comprehensive analysis of eligible youth and those lacking access to extended foster care, aiming to identify and close opportunity gaps. Recognizing the need for meaningful outcome measures, the group also advocates for the development of standardized “self-sufficiency milestones” to consistently define and track participant success. Additionally, the Workgroup is working to resolve challenges faced by youth whose juvenile court cases are automatically sealed at age 18, particularly in the Omaha and Winnebago Tribes, by seeking to streamline processes so that all eligible youth can access B2i without unnecessary legal hurdles.

2024 CASE REVIEW DATA HIGHLIGHTS

During the 2024 Calendar Year, the Foster Care Review Office (FCRO) conducted 214 case reviews of B2i participants. These reviews provide valuable insights into participant goals, progress, and overall outcomes.

Goal Area	% of Participants Selecting Goal	% Showing Progress
Transportation	97.2%	75.0%
Employment	93.0%	82.0%
Education	66.4%	73.0%
Finance	61.7%	52.0%
Housing	46.3%	75.0%
Health	33.6%	78.0%

Regarding demographic insights, males generally showed higher rates of progress on goals compared to females. White young adults showed higher progress in transportation, education and housing, while young adults of color showed higher progress in employment, finance, and health goals.

Overall Progress Toward Independence

- 93% of reviewed participants were making progress towards independent living,
- Progress rates were similar across gender and race/ethnicity
 - 93% of females and 95% of males
 - 93% of white young adults and 94% of young adults of color
- Young adults with only one removal from their home as minors had the highest progress rates (96%), compared to those with multiple removals (92%).
- Placement history had minimal impact: 93% of those with fewer than four placements and 94% with four or more placements were making progress

Key Influencers on Progress

- Participants with **four or more instances of missing from care** as minors were **four times as likely** not to make progress on health goals,
- Those **without a reliable support system** were **21 times as likely** to experience unstable housing
- Young adults **with safe housing** were **four times as likely** to make progress on employment goals.

BRIDGE TO INDEPENDENCE DATA & EVALUATION

Heather Wood, Chair

The Data & Evaluation Workgroup provides three recommendations:

1. Improve understanding of eligibility and access

We recommend conducting a comprehensive analysis to accurately identify the number of youth eligible for the Bridge to Independence (B2i) Program, as well as those who are not presented with the same opportunity for extended foster care. This should include tracking by key subpopulations, such as tribal youth, wards, adoptive parents, probation youth, and guardianships, as well as examining reasons for ineligibility or lack of participation. By deepening our understanding of who is and is not accessing B2i, we can better target outreach efforts, address disparities, and ensure equitable access to critical support for all transitioning young people.

2. Establish clear self-sufficiency milestones

The Workgroup supports the development and implementation of standardized “self-sufficiency milestones” as tools to track skill increases and progress toward independence. B2i is a voluntary program, encouraging young adults to pursue milestones aligned with their unique goals and aspirations. Success should be defined by the growth in skills and self-sufficiency measures selected by each participant. Tracking these milestones will allow for better insight into growth and service needs while respecting participant individuality and autonomy.

3. Address barriers related to sealed juvenile court cases

The Workgroup recommends collaborating with tribal and state courts, particularly with the Omaha and Winnebago Tribes, to address challenges created when juvenile court cases are sealed at age 18. This practice currently requires youth to file additional court orders to unseal their records and apply for the B2i program, creating unnecessary barriers to access. The recommendation is to streamline or modify these processes so that eligible youth can more easily obtain the documentation needed for the B2i participation, ensuring that administrative procedures do not impede their transition to adulthood.

SUSTAINABILITY WORKGROUP

Felipe Longoria-Shinn, Chair

Over the past year, the Workgroup has refined its definition of “sustainability” by identifying six key domains crucial for a successful transition to adulthood:

1. Financial Well-Being
2. Education & Career Pathways
3. Hope, Confidence, Community Engagement
4. Social Skills & Support Networks
5. Whole Person Development
6. High Expectations & Youth Voice

This year, the Workgroup prioritized Domain 3 (Hope, Confidence & Community Engagement) and Domain 5 (Whole Person Development). These areas are closely tied to a young person’s ability to achieve their full potential. The group emphasized that activities enabling youth to explore their strengths and interests are vital to whole-person development and fostering hope for the future. However, current B2i participation requirements do not formally recognize exploration activities as counting toward required hours for education or employment.

The Workgroup also identified the importance of expanding each participant’s support system beyond professional staff. While Independence Coordinators play a crucial role in service connection, they may not have deep ties to the communities where young adults most identify. The Workgroup encourages increased involvement from community agencies and partners, emphasizing that a robust and diverse support network is essential for sustained success. The Workgroup provides two recommendations:

1. Recognize Leadership and Interest Exploration as Participation Hours

Allow leadership development and interest exploration activities, such as participation in Youth Advisory Boards, Legislative Days, and similar opportunities, to count toward the required B2i participation hours. The Workgroup recommends a reasonable cap, such as up to 10 hours per month, to ensure these activities are meaningfully integrated without replacing core educational or employment pursuits.

2. Strengthening Community-Based Support Networks

Develop strategies to engage more supportive adults from within each participant’s community. This may include formal partnerships with local organizations, mentorship programs, or outreach to culturally relevant community leaders. Expanding the network of caring adults will help ensure that every young person in B2i has access to a support system that reflects their unique background, interests, and needs.

IMMIGRATION WORKGROUP

Felipe Longoria-Shinn, Chair

The Immigration Workgroup remains dedicated to dismantling barriers that prevent immigrant youth from accessing the B2i Program. While all state wards in Nebraska are eligible for services as minors regardless of immigration status, those without legal status lose eligibility for extended support when they turn 19. This exclusion runs counter to the B2i program's fundamental principle: that no young person is fully prepared for adulthood at 19, regardless of their background.

In 2025, Senator Machaela Cavanaugh introduced LB181, seeking to expand B2i eligibility to all youth aging out of foster care, regardless of citizenship status, and to guarantee medical care access for these young adults. Despite strong advocacy efforts, LB181 did not advance, leaving this gap unaddressed. **Expanding B2i access for immigrant youth remains a central recommendation of this workgroup and the Advisory Committee.**

The urgency of this issue has only increased following several major federal developments. On June 27, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of allowing President Trump's executive order restricting birthright citizenship to take effect in a handful of states. While the ruling does not immediately revoke citizenship from those already recognized, it has introduced significant legal uncertainty affecting immigrant families across the country.

In response, federal agencies and Congressional leaders remain sharply divided on the issue, and efforts to establish nationwide guidance for states have stalled. The Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the Administration for Children and Families, have not yet issued clear directives on how state child welfare agencies should serve immigrant youth in light of the new legal landscape. Meanwhile, Congress has yet to pass legislation providing protections or clarifications for immigrant youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

As a result, many Nebraska immigrant youth and families face growing confusion and anxiety. They fear the patchwork of state-level policies that now governs eligibility, as well as the potential for more young people to become stateless or lose access to support as they exit care without established legal status. These uncertainties further jeopardize stability and opportunity for immigrant youth, reflecting the ongoing need for urgent state action.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Ron Giesselmann & Payne Ackerman, Co-Chairs

The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee was established as the Normalcy Task Force under the Nebraska Children's commission to oversee and advise on Nebraska's implementation of the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183 (referred to as the "Strengthening Families Act" or "SFA"). Nebraska's own SFA, codified in Neb. rev. Stat. 43-4702, aligns state policy with federal mandates and incorporates input from statewide stakeholders.

Over the past year, the Committee has actively convened to fulfill its statutory obligations. Its core responsibilities include reviewing normalcy plans for youth in care, evaluating anti-trafficking efforts statewide, and providing recommendations concerning Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) practices. In direct response to earlier committee recommendations, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) now provides Transition Youth Advocates in every Nebraska service area to support youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The committee's co-chairs during this reporting period have been Payne Ackerman and Ron Giesselmann.

The Committee recognizes an ongoing need to strengthen engagement with members, state senators, youth, and the wider community to advance its recommendations and SFA implementation each year. Notably, the successful adoption of designated Transition Youth Practices by DHHS demonstrates and reinforces the Committee's impact on policy and practice.

For more information or to get involved, please visit our website: childrens.nebraska.gov, or email necc.contact@nebraska.gov

TRAFFICKING WORKGROUP

Ron Giesselmann, Chair

The Trafficking Subcommittee provides oversight of Nebraska’s anti-trafficking efforts, with a special focus on the vulnerabilities of youth in care to both sex and labor trafficking. Although the Subcommittee does not convene regularly, the broader SFA Committee reviews trafficking data and statewide partnerships to inform its actions. Partnerships with Nebraska PATH (Partnership Against the Trafficking of Humans) have enhanced the Committee’s understanding and surveillance of trafficking trends, while collaboration with the Attorney General’s Office has bolstered training initiatives and public awareness campaigns.

In 2024, more than 2,000 professionals and community stakeholders received specialized anti-trafficking training, and awareness materials were distributed extensively in public spaces. The Subcommittee also observed positive cross-sector engagement in events such as the Human Trafficking Task Force Summit, which attracts diverse partners and facilitates the sharing of best practices. Members of this Subcommittee plan to attend the 2025 Summit.

The Trafficking Workgroup recommends the following:

Prioritize coalition building with tribal governments and community leaders as a core anti-trafficking strategy. Formal, cross-sector collaboration should include tribal representatives, child welfare agencies, law enforcement, Nebraska PATH, and key service providers to coordinate resources, share data, and identify emerging risks. This coalition should guide the development of culturally responsive anti-trafficking training and outreach, ensuring tribal communities have a direct voice in strategy and service delivery.

The broader SFA Committee should dedicate standing agenda time and resources to ongoing relationship-building with tribes, supporting participation on tribal lands and adapting approaches to address community-identified needs. These steps will help ensure that anti-trafficking efforts remain collaborative, locally informed, and effective statewide.

NORMALCY WORKGROUP

Felicia Nelson, Chair

The Normalcy Subcommittee is responsible for monitoring the implementation of Nebraska's Strengthening Families Act, particularly reviewing normalcy plans and reports to ensure youth in state care have access to appropriate activities as outlined in Neb. Rev. Statute 43-4706. However, the subcommittee has been largely inactive in recent months. As of September 2024, activity was paused pending broader committee decisions, with changes in leadership and a planned review of the group's future direction by the SFA Committee.

Recent discussions among the SFA Committee co-chairs, captured in the March 31st, 2025 meeting, further reflect the challenges currently facing the subcommittee. Conversations focused significantly on the impact of major federal funding cuts, including Medicaid reductions currently contested in court, and difficulties passing new funding bills given the state's budget deficit. This fiscal uncertainty directly affects recommendations for supporting families and reflects why funding components of past proposals were considered sticking points.

Additionally, a new Family Support workgroup is in early discussion stages, aiming to address changes in federal and state policy. While there is interest in advancing this work, participation may be affected by the current climate and the perceived lack of enforcement behind committee recommendations. Member emphasized on the importance of communication to participants that their input has a genuine impact, despite uncertainty about implementation.

As of July 2025, the Normalcy Subcommittee remains on hold. Its reactivation or reconfiguration awaits a decision by the full SFA Committee, which will need to weigh leadership changes, fiscal realities, and new legislative considerations before proceedings.

APPLA WORKGROUP

Payne Ackerman, Chair

This workgroup is a collaborative, youth-centered initiative designed to address the unique challenges faced by youth transitioning out of care. It is particularly focused on supporting those with Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) permanency goal or those exiting care without traditional permanency outcomes, such as adoption or reunification. The primary mission of the workgroup is to create pathways and ensure long-term success in independent living, employment, and educational goals. To achieve this, the workgroup will address service gaps, develop targeted resources, and advocate for supportive policies and best practices at all levels of government.

Guided by the voices of youth and informed by lived experiences, the workgroup develops innovative programs, services, resources, and policies to build a comprehensive framework of aftercare supports. This framework is designed to empower youth, dismantle systemic barriers, and promote long-term stability. By leveraging partnerships across public, private, and nonprofit sectors and amplifying the perspectives of those with lived experience, the workgroup strives to foster independence, stability, and success for young adults leaving the child welfare system as they transition into productive and fulfilling lives.

The following timeline has been proposed for the workgroup:

1. Phase 1 (0-6 months): Establish a workgroup, secure funding, and recruit members.
2. Phase 2 (6-12 months): Develop legislative proposals, create pilot programs, and conduct initial training for advocates.
3. Phase 3 (12-24 months): Implement pilot programs, advocate for legislation, and expand services based on evaluations.

Nebraska Children's Commission Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Jarren Breeling	Voting	Voice and Choice Advocate, DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Misty Flowers (Chair)	Voting	Stakeholder	Representative of a federally recognized Indian tribe residing within the State of Nebraska
Abigail Fox	Voting	Young Adult	Young Adult previously in Foster Care
Ron Giesselmann	Voting	Executive Director, Masonic-Eastern Star Home for Children	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Richard Hasty	Voting	Superintendent, Plattsmouth Community Schools	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Sara Hoyle	Voting	Human Services Director, Lancaster County	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Melissa Nance (Vice Chair)	Voting	Vice President of Service Delivery, CEDARS Youth Services	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Felicia Nelsen	Voting	Executive Director, Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Melissa Nilges	Voting	Biological Parent	Biological Parent currently or previously involved with the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Lana Temple-Plotz	Voting	Chief Executive Officer, Nebraska Children's Home Society	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Susan Thomas	Voting	Court Appointed Special Advocate, Nebraska CASA Association	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
LaShawn Young	Voting	Attorney, Young & Young Attorneys at Law	Stakeholder of the Child Welfare or Juvenile Justice System
Sen. Christy Armendariz	Ex-Officio	Senator, District 18, Nebraska Legislative Council	Designee of the Chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the Legislature
Dr. Alyssa Bish	Ex-Officio	Director, Division of Children & Family Services, DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services	Director of Children and Family Services Division of DHHS
Lane Carr	Ex-Officio	Policy & Strategic Initiatives Administrator, Nebraska Department of Education/Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	Designee of the Commissioner of the Department of Education
Jennifer Carter	Ex-Officio	Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare, Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare	Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Monika Gross	Ex-Officio	Executive Director, Foster Care Review Office	Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office
Thomas Janousek	Ex-Officio	Deputy Director, DHHS, Division of Behavioral Health	Director of Behavioral Health Division of DHHS
Sen. Glen Meyer	Ex-Officio	Senator, District 17, Nebraska Legislative Council	Designee of the Chairperson of the HHS Committee of the Legislature
Kari Rumbaugh	Ex-Officio	Deputy Administrator of the Division of Juvenile Services, Administrative Office of Probation	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Judge Amy Schuchman	Ex-Officio	Separate Juvenile Court Judge, Douglas County Separate Juvenile Court	Appointed by the State Court Administrator
Deb VanDyke-Ries	Ex-Officio	Director, Nebraska Court Improvement Project	Appointed by the State Court Administrator

