

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2024 Interim

June 19, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 1st meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children was held on June 19, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Danny Carroll, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Samara Heavrin Co-Chair; Senator Danny Carroll Co-Chair; Senators Julie Raque Adams, Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Greg Elkins, Stephen Meredith, Lindsey Tichenor, Robin L. Webb, Whitney Westerfield, and Max Wise; Representatives Shane Baker, Mike Clines, Jennifer Decker, Daniel Elliott, Ken Fleming, Jim Gooch Jr., Felicia Rabourn, Josie Raymond, Steve Riley, and Sarah Stalker.

Guests: Lesa Dennis, Commissioner, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services; Melanie Taylor, Division Director, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services; Shannon Moody, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer, Kentucky Youth Advocates; Cynthia Schepers, Peer Coach Coordinator, Kentucky Youth Advocates; Kayla Hatfield, Advocate; Damareus Jackson-Martin, Advocate; Mica Wood Pence, Family Court Judge, 43rd Judicial Circuit Division 2; Jennifer Sacharnoski Nelson, Advocate.

LRC Staff: Samir Nasir, Logan Bush, and DJ Burns.

Consideration of Referred Administrative Regulations

The following administrative regulations were placed on the agenda for consideration:

922 KAR 001:140 Proposed Permanency services.

922 KAR 001:145 Proposed Subsidized permanent custody.

922 KAR 001:495 Proposed

Training requirements for foster parents, adoptive parents, and respite care providers for children in the custody of the cabinet.

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Subsidized permanent custody.

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Training requirements for foster parents, adoptive parents, and respite care providers for children in the custody of the cabinet.

922 KAR 001:565 Proposed

Service array for a relative or fictive kin caregiver.

922 KAR 005:070 Proposed

Adult protective services.

922 KAR 005:120 Proposed

Vulnerable adult maltreatment registry and appeals.

The listed administrative regulations were reviewed by the committee.

Discussion of Foster Care and Adoption Processes

Lesa Dennis, Commissioner, Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), Cabinet for Health & Family Services (CHFS), discussed the DCBS child welfare mission, statistics on children in out-of-home care, and changes for caregivers including subsidized permanent custody (SPC). Melanie Taylor, Division Director, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services, discussed the expectations and approval process for foster and adoptive parents, statistics on finalized adoptions, and adoption barriers.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Carroll, Ms. Taylor stated that the funding for adoption subsidies to pay for attorney fees are from federal and general funds.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Westerfield, Ms. Taylor stated that the 652 children available for adoption are on the Kentucky Adoption Profile Exchange (KAPE) and listed on the adoptuskids.org website for anyone interested in adoption. Commissioner Dennis stated that CHFS is working on targeted recruitment adoption for the older children available and have partnered with the Dave Thomas Foundation. Federal funding pays for advertisement campaigns to help spotlight KAPE and the children available for adoption in Kentucky. Ms. Taylor stated she would review the statistics on the length of time for permanency placement and send them later.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Fleming, Commissioner Dennis stated that CHFS would work on getting metrics for the length of time for permanency placement and compare it to any changes from the past.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Webb, Commissioner Dennis stated that CHFS will determine the best option for each child rather it is adoption, relative/fictive kin care, or foster care. She stated that if SPC is given, the case would go back before a judge to adjust the custody of a child.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Raque Adams, Commissioner Dennis stated that CHFS is supportive of SB 151 from the 2024 session but without additional funding provided by the Legislature, CHFS will not be able to implement the bill. A letter was sent from CHFS outlining support but asking for additional funding to implement the bill.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Webb, Commissioner Dennis stated that the estimated cost of implementation of SB 151 from the 2024 session is twenty million dollars. That cost included additional staffing and the cost of care for children impacted by the bill.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Fleming, Commissioner Dennis stated that she would have to get the information on vacancy credits and send later.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Stalker, Commissioner Dennis stated that children impacted by SB 151 are in the care of relative/fictive kin caregiver and in order to receive federal funding the child must be in the care of the state.

Mica Wood Pence, Family Court Judge, 43rd Judicial Circuit Division 2, discussed her perspective of the adoption process, barriers, and delays in the timeline of the process from the time a child is removed from a home until adoption.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Carroll, Judge Pence stated that in her opinion paying more for attorneys in adoption cases will provide a better quality attorney. Filing a termination of parental rights in the 15 months timeline makes the process move faster, whether that leads to adoption or to reunification with the parent.

Shannon Moody, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer, Kentucky Youth Advocates, discussed pathways to permanency for foster care and kinship care children, the importance of permanency, barriers to permanency, and recommendations to streamline this process. Damareus Jackson-Martin, Advocate, discussed his story of being in foster care and adoption within the system. Kayla Hatfield, Advocate, discussed her story of being raised by her grandmother a fictive kin caregiver and the struggles that came with it. Cynthia

Schepers, Peer Coach Coordinator, Kentucky Youth Advocates, discussed struggles she has heard from children who have been adopted and then kicked out once they turn eighteen.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Carroll, Ms. Moody stated that post adoption supports are available but many parents are not aware they exist. Mr. Jackson-Martin stated that those supports were not advertised when he was adopted in 2013.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Heavrin, Ms. Moody stated that Kentucky Youth Advocated is in support of SB 151 and is aware of the problems with implementation.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Decker, Mr. Jackson-Martin stated that a community around adoptive and foster parents would help with adopted children not being kicked out once they turn 18. Ms. Moody stated that when adopting a child, the job of a parent does not end at 18. Ms. Schepers stated that DCBS should follow up with the child and parent to make sure things are still working and offer help if needed.

Jennifer Sacharnoski Nelson, Advocate, discussed the disconnect between the laws and policy within the adoptive process and struggles she has faced with her adoptive child.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.