

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2025 Interim

November 12, 2025

Call to Order and Roll Call

The sixth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children was held on November 12, 2025, 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 Matthew Deneen, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Rick Girdler, Stephen Meredith, Robin L. Webb, and Gex Williams; and Representatives Emily Callaway, Mike Clines, Stephanie Dietz, Steven Doan, Robert Duvall, Kim Holloway, Kimberly Poore Moser, Felicia Rabourn, Rachel Roarx, Sarah Stalker, and Nick Wilson.

Guests: Rachel Moldoveanu, Parent, Advocate; Brooke Ford, Admissions Case Manager, Heartspring; April Lowery, Assistant Director, Department for Medicaid Services (DMS), Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS); Carmen Hancock, Division Director, DMS, CHFS; Laura Presley, Branch Manager, DMS, CHFS; Benjamin Harrison, Chair, The Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet; Elisha Mahoney, Executive Staff Advisor, Acting Director, The Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet; Dr. Christina Howard, Chief, Division of Pediatric Forensic Medicine, University of Kentucky (UK) Healthcare; Karena Cash, Data and Research Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA); and Shannon Moody, Chief Policy, Strategy Officer, KYA.

LRC Staff: Logan Bush, Ben Payne, Cameron Franey, and Becky Lancaster.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the October 22, 2025, meeting was made by Co-Chair Heavrin, seconded by Senator Deneen, and approved by voice vote.

Accidental Ingestion of Illegal Drug Products by Children

Benjamin Harrison, Chair, The Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, discussed members appointed to the panel to represent various organizations.

Elisha Mahoney, Executive Staff Advisor, Acting Director, The Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, discussed the number of fatal versus near fatal cases of pediatric ingestions, average age of pediatric ingestion cases, geographical data of overdose and ingestion cases, types of substances ingested, cannabinoid, fentanyl and xylazine exposures, increase of methamphetamine ingestions, and the decrease of buprenorphine exposures. She discussed specific details of three fatal and near fatal adolescent cases that had several missed opportunities for prevention and issues mismanaged by multiple agencies.

In response to Senator Webb, Mr. Harrison discussed what needed to be done to upgrade the criminal code of abuse to include unsafe access to illegal substances.

In response to Senator Deneen, Dr. Christina Howard, Chief, Division of Pediatric Forensic Medicine, UK Healthcare, discussed lack of standardization for reporting unsafe access to illegal substances and recommended creating a manual to standardize pediatric ingestion investigations.

In response to Representative Dietz, Mr. Harrison discussed reviewing the role of the guardian ad litem in abuse and neglect cases.

In response to Representative Moser, Co-Chair Heavrin discussed issues with central intake for mandatory child abuse reporting. Mr. Harrison discussed problems with reports rising to the level of investigation and the need for review.

Update on Kentucky Residential Autism Services

Rachel Moldoveanu, Parent, Advocate, discussed her son's diagnosis of profound, nonverbal autism and lack of access for supports, staff, and services needed as an adult with special needs to thrive in his local community. She discussed the reasoning and process of moving her son to the Heartspring facility in Wichita, Kansas, the services provided, and his positive outcomes with adequate supports and services provided to him.

Brooke Ford, Admissions Case Manager, Heartspring, discussed Heartspring's campus demographics, therapies available to students, funding agents for the program, the therapeutic school, behavioral and psychiatric care, speech-language and occupational therapies, medical services, vocational training program, and community outings, all provided to the students.

In response to Chair Carroll, Ms. Ford discussed funding from various states with a single-service agreement with approval or accreditation from the student's home state.

In response to Senator Williams, Ms. Ford stated Heartspring does not offer equine therapy at this time.

Representative Stalker discussed her commitment to find a way so that future students with neurodevelopmental disabilities do not have to go far away to receive the services and supports needed to thrive in a community.

In response to Representative Callaway, Ms. Moldoveanu discussed how the workforce could be found in Kentucky if reimbursement rates were raised for providers.

Laura Presley, Branch Manager, DMS, CHFS, discussed there was a single case agreement with Heartspring and she could follow up on details regarding other cases sent to Heartspring.

In response to Chair Carroll, Ms. Presley stated it is possible that an enhanced rate was used in that single case agreement and the family was able to retain custody of their son.

Carmen Hancock, Division Director, DMS, CHFS, discussed the proposal for the 1915C Child Waiver that would support this type of single case agreement for children with complex behavioral, developmental needs to keep families intact with a residential component.

In response to Chair Carroll, Ms. Hancock stated the 1915C Child Waiver will serve 100 children.

In response to Chair Carroll, Ms. Ford stated there have been discussions about expanding Heartspring but there are no plans at this time. She stated four of the Kentucky children were placed at Heartspring because they had been living at Peace Hospital for a long period of time and three were placed at Heartspring due to hearing Ms. Moldoveanu's story.

Kentucky Youth Advocates – Kids Count Data Report

Shannon Moody, Chief Policy, Strategy Officer, KYA, discussed KYA's goals and partnerships to advocate for children and the national Kids Count Data Center project.

Karena Cash, Data and Research Director, discussed four areas of data comparing national versus Kentucky Kids Count data trends and rankings per domain, specific information in Kentucky's Kids Count data book, criteria looked at in each domain, access to free meals for students, and the Kids Count data dashboard release. Ms. Moody discussed how the data informs policy and KYA's legislation budget priorities.

In response to Senator Funke Frommeyer, Ms. Cash stated the food insecurity rates come from Feed America's Map the Meal Gap program that utilizes the annual United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) food insecurity report.

In response to Representative Callaway, Ms. Moody discussed the reasoning why minors are accidentally named on a petition of eviction, the goal of ensuring dismissals can be expunged, and minor names can be removed.

In response to Representative Duvall, Ms. Moody discussed the use and impact of the JUUL settlement funds.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:49 PM.