

# **INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**

## **Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the 2026 Interim**

**June 17, 2026**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The first meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children was held on June 17, 2026, at 1:00 PM ET/12:00 PM CT 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, Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Stephen Meredith, Robby Mills, Reginald L. Thomas, Robin L. Webb, and Gex Williams; and Representatives Tina Bojanowski, Emily Callaway, Mike Clines, Stephanie Dietz, Steven Doan, Daniel Elliott, Kim Holloway, Felicia Rabourn, Rachel Roarx, Sarah Stalker, and Nick Wilson.

Guests: Dr. Rachel Womack, Director of Training, LEND Director, Human Development Institute (HDI), Assistant Professor, College of Social Work, University of Kentucky (UK); Johnny W. Collett, Deputy Executive Director, HDI, UK; Bart Baldwin, Founder, CEO, Baldwin Consulting; Shannon O'Connor, Executive Director, ABA Advocates, Kentucky Association for Behavior Analysis; Olivia Winstead Hardy, BCBA, LBA, Behavior Services Director, Puzzle Pieces; Veronica Sullivan, Office of Special Education and Early Learning, Division of IDEA Implementation and Preschool, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE); Melody Cooper, Policy Advisor, Office of Special Education and Early Learning, KDE; Jan Sellers, Office of Teaching and Learning, Division of Academic Program Standards, KDE; Larry Taylor, Ed.D., Executive Director, Kentucky Autism Training Center (KATC), University of Louisville (UL); Heidi Cooley-Cook, M. Ed., Deputy Director, KATC, UL; Christy Bryce, Ed.D., Director, Kentucky Academic and Behavioral Response to Intervention (ABRI), UL; Jennifer Pollard, Ph.D., Behavior Analyst, Researcher, Kentucky Academic and Behavioral Response to Intervention, UL; Leslie Hoffmann, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Medicaid Services (DMS), Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS); Carmen Hancock, Director, Long Term Care and Supports, DMS, CHFS; Crystal Adams, Division Director, Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), CHFS; Melanie Taylor, Director, Division of Protection and Permanency, DBHDID, CHFS; Lesa Dennis, Commissioner, Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), CHFS; and Dr. Steven Stack, Secretary, CHFS.

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

## **Discussion on Autism and Autism Services in the Commonwealth**

### **A. University of Kentucky**

Dr. Rachel Womack, Director of Training, LEND Director, HDI, Assistant Professor, College of Social Work, UK, discussed the differences in a medical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and an educational autism classification, national trends in both medical and educational criteria, barriers to autism diagnostic services, changes to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), improved screening efforts, and programs administered by the HDI.

Johnny W. Collett, Deputy Executive Director, HDI, UK, discussed HDI's work with employers and the growth of programs that work with young adults with intellectually disabilities to attend college.

### **B. ABA Advocates**

Shannon O'Connor, Executive Director, ABA Advocates, Kentucky Association for Behavior Analysis, discussed the need for early intervention with an autistic diagnosis, the applied behavior analysis standard of care for treating ASD, the realities of waitlists for services with an impact on students and parents, inadequate service rates for behavioral health services, and managed care organizations (MCOs) partnerships and compliance challenges.

Olivia Winstead Hardy, BCBA, LBA, Behavior Services Director, Puzzle Pieces, discussed the impact when applied behavior analysis services are and are not available, the waitlist range for services, negative outcomes due to lack of services, and loss of trained professionals due to low reimbursement rates creating workforce shortages.

### **C. Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)**

Jan Sellers, Office of Teaching and Learning, Division of Academic Program Standards, KDE, discussed the use of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for students diagnosed with ASD, the MTSS cascading system of support used by each team, and elements of the 3-tier system.

Veronica Sullivan, Office of Special Education and Early Learning, Division of IDEA Implementation and Preschool, KDE, discussed the Office of Special Education and Early Learning's (OSEEL's) system of support with resources specific to ASD, federal funding used for a statewide network of technical assistance (TA) providers, regional TA centers, and partnerships with KATC and ABRI.

#### **D. Kentucky Autism Training Center (KATC)**

Larry Taylor, Ed.D., Executive Director, KATC, UL, discussed KATC's role in providing training, consultation, and resources for schools, families, and community partners alongside KDE.

Heidi Cooley-Cook, M. Ed., Deputy Director, KATC, UL, discussed the different types of statewide supports and expanded resources to all counties

#### **E. Kentucky Academic and Behavioral Response to Intervention (ABRI)**

Christy Bryce, Ed.D., Director, Kentucky ABRI, UL, discussed access to evidence-based practices within the Center for Instructional and Behavioral Research in Schools (CIBRS) project at UL to serve the 3 goals of the North Star Priorities, the research course library, and course completion rates.

Jennifer Pollard, Ph.D., Behavior Analyst, Researcher, Kentucky ABRI, UL, discussed information available to teachers and paraprofessionals to provide additional professional development.

#### **F. Cabinet for Health and Family Services**

Crystal Adams, Division Director, DBHDID, CHFS, discussed the functions of the Office Autism, statutory representatives on the Kentucky Advisory Council on Autism, subcommittees within the council, and the resources available by the council.

Leslie Hoffmann, Deputy Commissioner, DMS, CHFS, discussed the traditional Medicaid eligibility pathways, services provided by Medicaid, the federal Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit, and the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waivers.

Carmen Hancock, Director, Long Term Care and Supports, DMS, CHFS, discussed the 7 1915(c) waiver programs and specific distinctions regarding out-of-state waiver services.

Melanie Taylor, Director, Division of Protection and Permanency, DBHDID, CHFS, discussed the number of youths, barriers to in-state care, the impact on the children, and the specialized community-based care provider for foster youths with ASD.

In response to Chair Carroll, Dr. Steven Stack, Secretary, CHFS, stated that unfortunately, the in-state provider network cannot meet all the needs for all situations for children that are housed out-of-state.

In response to Representative Bojanowski, Dr. Womack stated DSM-5 criteria does not include a designation for profound autism, a person with level 3 ASD would need significant supports and the rate of children diagnosed as level 3 ASD is increasing.

In response to Senator Meredith, Dr. Womack stated there are many conflicting opinions regarding the increase in autism diagnosis among children but could be due to the changed diagnostic criteria, better awareness, and improved screening processes.

In response to Representative Stalker, Ms. Cooper stated the decision to house and educate a child out-of-state would be the decision of the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) for students with disabilities. Secretary Stack discussed the difficulties of eligibility for a person that may not qualify for Medicaid financially but has a qualifying diagnosis, the role HCBS waivers, and out-of-state placement situations.

In response to Chair Carroll, Secretary Stack stated there have circumstances where the state could negotiate an individual rate for a specific situation. However, there was no money to offer in finding a willing provider.

In response to Representative Callaway, Secretary Stack stated there are people with unmet needs but CHFS is helping many people, programs can be duplicative but are still doing great work for the HCBS waiver community, and that continued dialog among stakeholders is the best way to find better options for everyone.

### **Legislative Hearing on the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) 2027 State Plan**

Lesa Dennis, Commissioner, DCBS, CHFS, discussed the responsibilities of DCBS, history and goals of the SSBG, the 2026 SSBG budget, and expenditures of general funds.

Melanie Taylor, Director, Division of Protection and Permanency, DCBS, CHFS, discussed the adult protective services (APS) funding, increase of caretaker neglect in APS substantiated intakes, Child Protective Services (CPS) funding, the increase in CPS reports that meet acceptance criteria, home safety services, and juvenile services.

A motion was made by Senator Meredith and seconded by Senator Deneen that the SSBG 2027 State Plan be passed favorably. After a roll call vote, the SSBG 2027 State Plan was passed out favorably.

### **Items Received for Review**

The half-year block grant status reports for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), SSBG, and the Temporary Assistance

for Needy Families (TANF), were received by the committee. Chair Carroll urged each member to review the reports.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.