

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the 2026 Interim

July 20, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children was held on July 20, 2026, at 1:00 PM ET/12:00 PM CT in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Samara Heavrin, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Danny Carroll, Co-Chair; Representative Samara Heavrin, Co-Chair; Senators Matthew Deneen, Keturah J. Herron, Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Stephen Meredith, and Gex Williams; and Representatives Tina Bojanowski, Emily Callaway, Mike Clines, Stephanie Dietz, Steven Doan, Daniel Elliott, Michael Sarge Pollock, Steve Riley, Sarah Stalker, and Nick Wilson.

Guests: Dr. Melissa Currie, MD, Board-Certified, Child Abuse Pediatrician, Norton Children's Pediatric Protection Specialists; Steve Shannon, Executive Director, Kentucky Association of Regional Programs, Incorporated; Elisha Mahoney, Executive Staff Advisor, Acting Director, Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel(CFNF-ERP), Justice and Public Safety Cabinet; Alicia Whatley, Senior Policy and Advocacy Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA); and Karena Cash, Data and Research Director, KYA.

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

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Representative Callaway and seconded by Senator Meredith, to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2026, meeting. Minutes were approved by voice vote.

Consideration of Referred Administrative Regulations

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

911 KAR 001:010 Proposed - Application for Clinical Programs.

911 KAR 001:085 Proposed - Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program.

911 KAR 001:091 Proposed - Repeal of 911 KAR 1:090.

All of the above listed administrative regulations were reviewed.

Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel 2025 Annual Report

Dr. Melissa Currie, MD, Board-Certified, Child Abuse Pediatrician, Norton Children's Pediatric Protection Specialists, discussed the CFNF-ERP independent process of investigation and determination, number of case reviews completed, annual report submission and response procedures, separate examples of near fatal ingestion, physical abuse, and neglect of a child with medical complexity cases, and the recommendations by the CFNF-ERP for each type of the case.

In response to Representative Heavrin, Dr. Currie discussed the vitamin K shot given at birth to protect infants from the risk of hemorrhagic disease.

Dr. Currie discussed the type of drugs involved in prenatal exposures and the safe care recommendations of the CFNF-ERP relating to the prevention of a fatal overdose or ingestion by a child.

In response to Representative Elliott, Dr. Currie stated, in the case regarding a 3-year-old child's near fatal ingestion of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), DCBS did an investigation and abuse or neglect was substantiated.

In response to Representative Wilson, Dr. Currie stated the CFNF-ERP typically sees that ingested medications are found to be in the original bottle as children can often open the child resistant caps, and medication lock boxes are the best place to store medications.

Steve Shannon, Executive Director, KARP, Inc., stated medications are not typically securely stored and lack of awareness of the seriousness of the chemicals being brought into a home with children remains an issue.

In response to Representative Heavrin, Dr. Currie stated she believes the state has the ability to require childproof lids be put on THC products. Dr. Currie stated Delta-9 THC is considered an illicit substance but is available in gas stations across the state, and law enforcement not removing it is an issue.

In response to Representative Bojanowski, Dr. Currie stated the CFNF-ERP has found that many children who are considered medically fragile have not been to school for extended lengths of time and are isolated. Mr. Shannon stated often a child is pulled out of school to homeschool when action was taken to investigate the child's situation and that legislation to create a state registry of medically frail children would be helpful but challenging. Dr. Currie stated sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) does include sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) cases, the Department for Community Based

Services (DCBS) does not substantiate neglect for unsafe sleep unless the caretaker is impaired. The CFNF-ERP, however, does consider unsafe sleep neglect.

In response to Senator Herron, Mr. Shannon stated financial insecurities can be a characteristic of a family under investigation but considered as a cause or reason for the abuse or neglect. Dr. Currie discussed the four types of barriers they typically see during case reviews.

In response to Representative Stalker, Dr. Currie discussed the difference in a case with a DCBS history and DCBS issue, a person with DCBS history does not necessarily have a substantiated case, and that previous investigation or non-substantiations are known by the panel members and are included in the CFNF-ERP timelines and summaries.

Elisha Mahoney, Executive Staff Advisor, Acting Director, CFNF-ERP, Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, stated the CFNF-ERP members do track the number of allegations or investigations but do not report on it.

Representative Heavrin stated the panel members sign nondisclosures and confidentiality statements each year regarding the reviews.

In response to Representative Mays Bledsoe, Mr. Shannon stated the CFNF-ERP submits its recommendations to the appropriate departments at CHFS, and many of the recommendations are implemented as the CFNF-ERP works collaboratively with CHFS.

In response to Representative Callaway, Dr. Currie discussed the Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS) program. Mr. Shannon discussed the Kentucky Persons Returning to Society from Incarceration Technical Advisory Committee (Re-Entry TAC) waiver program connected to the Medicaid system.

2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book Discussion

Karena Cash, Data and Research Director, KYA, discussed the objectives of the Kentucky KIDS COUNT Project, national rankings regarding Kentucky children's economic well-being, education, health, family, and community, and findings in the state data dashboard for county level data in each of the four domains.

Alicia Whatley, Senior Policy and Advocacy Director, KYA, discussed recommendations for legislative opportunities to improve child outcomes, declining Kentucky Incentives for Prevention (KIP) participation, and preparing for the 2030 census.

In response to Senator Mays Bledsoe, Ms. Cash discussed Ready to Learn for kindergarten aged children. Senator Carroll stated the University of Kentucky is analyzing various assessment tools to determine kindergarten readiness.

In response to Representative Stalker, Ms. Cash identified and discussed how entities define a lack of secure employment and food insecurity for parents and children.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.