

State Child Welfare Commissions and Task Forces

Elected officials use commissions, task forces and other ad hoc (temporary) bodies to examine matters of public concern and to issue recommendations for improvement. This overview describes groups created by state legislatures to examine and report on issues related to foster care or child welfare, and to recommend changes to improve outcomes for children. These commissions and task forces were established as vehicles for convening respected, knowledgeable individuals who have child welfare expertise or experience from a range of perspectives.¹

The information in this report is related to recent commissions and task forces created by state legislatures. Other state officials have established similar bodies:

- In a number of states, the Supreme Court Chief Justice or other judicial official has convened a commission to study and recommend child welfare system improvements.
- Governors have created blue ribbon commissions, task forces, or study groups in response to specific events or child welfare issues.
- Public child welfare agencies have established advisory groups, councils, or task forces that convene stakeholders to examine issues and develop solution-focused recommendations or agreements.
- State legislatures create study committees, select committees, task forces, or work groups composed of legislators to examine issues in more depth than is often possible during legislative sessions or through the standing committee structure.

Purpose, Goals, and Scope. Generally, state legislatures direct commissions and task forces to:

- Study specific or broader issues of public concern,
- Develop shared understanding of the current system and outcomes for children and the state,
- Build agreement regarding the desired outcomes for children and the child welfare system,
- identify barriers to desired outcomes, informed by stakeholders and formal resources, and
- Recommend policy, practice, organizational, and other strategies for improvement, often including a plan for monitoring progress.

The scope of work may target a specific concern, issue or population, such as the Missouri Task Force on Recruitment, Licensing and Retention of Foster Care and Adoptive Homes, and the Louisiana Task Force on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care. In other cases, the legislature provides the group with a broader charge and scope, such as the Kansas Child Welfare System Task Force and the Oregon Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission. The authorizing legislation for the Oregon Commission directs the group to recommend ways to monitor accountability on ten specific outcome measures.

Typically, commissions and task forces are charged with completing their work within a specific timeframe, usually ranging from few months to a couple of years. The groups usually study existing materials, hold public meetings, and invite written and/or in-person presentations on specific topics related to their purpose and goals. Written reports by the commission/task force to the Legislature and often the Governor, are required by a set date.

Members. Many entities and people have a stake and a role in improving the safety, permanency and well-being of children who come to the attention of child welfare system. Commissions and task forces include governmental and private sector leaders who have the ability to effect or influence change; constituents whose life experiences include child welfare services or whose lives have been impacted by the child welfare system; those who implement policies and provide services; and stakeholders who can influence and oversee the effectiveness of implementation.

These bodies provide an opportunity to bring together individuals and organizations who may not otherwise have an opportunity to provide and share with each other their valuable perspectives, expertise and experiences regarding child welfare challenges and opportunities.

Key participants to consider include leaders or representatives of:

- all three branches of state government, including:
 - legislators who chair or serve on committees of jurisdiction and/or oversight bodies with interest or expertise;
 - the state child welfare agency executive, and sometimes a representative of the Governor's office;
 - judicial officer of a court with jurisdiction of child welfare cases, and often the Administrative Office of the Courts or other judicial office knowledgeable of practice across courts statewide;
- tribes and/or tribal organizations;
- youth in foster care or alumni of foster care, foster parents, kinship caregivers, birth parents, and adoptive parents of children in foster care;
- multiple state agencies that contribute to outcomes for children and families, such as agencies that administer, supervise, or provide law enforcement, health care, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, education, financial assistance, and housing;
- private agencies that provide a range of child welfare services, including services that safely prevent the need for foster care, foster care services, and post permanency services;
- attorneys who represent the state, the state agency, children and parents;
- advocacy organizations;
- citizen review boards;
- other oversight entities, such as an ombudsman, state child advocate, or legislative program evaluation unit.

Lessons Learned. State experiences and achievements indicate that commissions and task forces can provide a useful mechanism for examining issues in more depth than is often possible within the legislative calendar and structure. The entities also provide a unique forum for bringing together individuals and organizations with a range of expertise, life experiences, and perspectives, who are invested in improving outcomes for children and families. The time-limited charge of commissions and task forces can create a sense of urgency for problem-solving and change. Often, such focused and time-limited opportunities for sharing information and problem-solving are otherwise lacking.

A common concern among commission/task force members and stakeholders is that the group's report and recommendations will "sit on a shelf" and will not lead to concrete changes

and improved outcomes for children. In states where task forces have proliferated, stakeholders see the groups as handy devices for officials to indicate their concern about intractable issues, but not necessarily to be followed by direct actions. Still other stakeholders report that by the time a group's report is completed, attention has been diverted to other issues and recommendations are shelved.²

Some steps that may help to ensure that the group's efforts have the desired impact include:

- Commitment and participation of leaders who can make and/or influence the recommended changes,
- Focus on measureable outcomes for children and systems,
- Realistic expectations and scope that are aligned with the commission's capacity and time frame,
- Coordination with existing entities that consider similar issues to avoid duplication and to ensure informed findings and recommendations,
- Recommendations that are doable, specific, and monitored for accomplishment and progress toward improved outcomes.³

State Child Welfare/Foster Care Commissions and Task Forces Created by State Legislatures (2011 to present)

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| <p>Kansas Child Welfare System Task Force http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Agency/CWSTF/Documents/Kansas%20Child%20Welfare%20System%20Task%20Force%20Charge.pdf</p> <p>Established by 2017 House Sub. for SB 126 http://www.kslegislature.org/li/b2017_18/measures/documents/summary_sb_126_2017.pdf http://www.kslegislature.org/li/b2017_18/measures/documents/sb126_enrolled.pdf</p> <p>Directs the Secretary for Children and Families to establish the task force.</p> |
| <p><u>Purpose, goals, and scope:</u> Task Force is directed to convene working groups to study the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the general administration of child welfare by the state department; • protective services; • family preservation; • reintegration; • foster care; and • permanency placement. <p>The Task Force and each working group are directed to study the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of oversight and supervision by DCF over each entity that contract entity; • The duties, responsibilities, and contributions of state agencies, nongovernmental entities, and child welfare service providers; • The level of access to child welfare services, including, but not limited to, health and mental health services and community based services; • The increasing number of children in the child welfare system and contributing factors; • The licensing standards for case managers; and • Any other topic the Task Force or working group deems necessary or appropriate. |

The Task Force must submit a preliminary progress report to the Legislature followed by a final report on or before January 14, 2019. The report is to include recommended improvements regarding the safety and well-being of children in the child welfare system, including:

- recommended changes to current law, rules and regulations, and child welfare system processes;
- whether an ongoing task force or similar advisory or oversight entity would aid in addressing child welfare system concerns; and
- any other topics the Task Force deems appropriate.

Members required:

- The Chair, Vice-Chair, and Ranking Minority member of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare;
- The Chair, Vice-Chair, and Ranking Minority member of the House Committee on Children and Seniors;
- An appointee of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;
- Court Appointed Special Advocates representative,;
- Representative of a foster parent organization;
- Member of the Child Death Review Board;
- One county or district attorney with experience in child in need of care (CINC) cases;
- One guardian ad litem;
- One family law attorney with experience in providing legal services to parents and grandparents in CINC cases;
- One licensed social worker;
- One Citizen Review Board member;
- One law enforcement officer.

Non-voting members:

- Secretary for Children and Families, or the Secretary's designee;
- Department for Children and Families (DCF) Prevention and Protection Services Director;
- One representative from each entity that contracts with DCF to provide foster care, family preservation, reintegration, and permanency placement services. [Note: Kansas' child welfare system is privatized, with the state agency providing child protective services only, and three provider agency providing or administering foster care, family preservation reunification services, adoption, and other services.]

Louisiana Task Force on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care

Created by 2015 HCR 168 and HR 171

<https://legiscan.com/LA/text/HCR168/2015>

<http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=957704>

Continued by 2016 HCR 94

<http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1006911>

Expired 2017.

Purpose, goals and scope: To study and explore the public policy and financing options for programs that could assist youth aging out of foster care to achieve successful independence once they reach the age of majority.

Separate legislation urged the Task Force to study and make recommendations concerning the problem of homelessness among persons who have aged out of foster care.

A 2017 report made practice, program, policy and funding recommendations.

https://www.regents.la.gov/assets/LegislativeResponse/HCR168_2015/LegislativeReportSummary.pdf

<http://dcfs.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/Child%20Welfare/YouthLink/Youth%20Aging%20Out%201%2023%202017%20Final%20Report-1.pdf>

Members: 2015 legislation specified 19 members, including two former foster care youth who have aged out of the foster care system and the leader or designee of the following:

- Department of Children and Family Services
- Department of Health and Hospitals
- Juvenile Judges Association or his designee
- Louisiana Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association
- Louisiana Association of Children and Family Agencies
- National Association of Social Workers, Louisiana Chapter
- Board of directors of Louisiana Progress
- Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops
- LouisianaChildren.org or his designee
- Louisiana Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
- HP Serve
- Covenant House - New Orleans
- Louisiana Workforce Commission
- The state superintendent of education
- Louisiana Community and Technical College System
- Louisiana Board of Regents
- Louisiana Housing Corporation
- Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Independent Living Provider Coalition.

2016 legislation added leaders or designees of:

- Children's Cabinet
- Drug policy, Office of the Governor
- Department of Health and Hospitals, office of public health, maternal and child health sector
- Department of Health and Hospitals, bureau of health services financing
- Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Louisiana Superintendent Association.

The Task Force was co-chaired by a designee of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers, Louisiana Chapter.

Staffing: Legislation required the Department of Children and Family Services to staff the Task Force.

Missouri Task Force on Recruitment, Licensing and Retention of Foster Care and Adoptive Homes

2011 HB 431 and 2011 SB requires the State Department of Social Services Children's Division to convene the task force.

<https://legiscan.com/MO/text/HB431/id/291283>

Purpose, goals and scope: To study the extent to which changes in the system of recruiting, licensing, and retaining foster and adoptive parents would enhance the effectiveness of the system statewide.

Develop a report of its findings with recommendations by December 1, 2011, and provide copies of the report to the general assembly and to the governor.

The report issued December 2011 made practice, organizational, policy and financing recommendations.

https://dss.mo.gov/cd/pdf/fc_report.pdf

Members: The legislation required:

- representatives of the division and department, and
- representatives of the private sector and faith-based community which provide recruitment and licensure services.

19 members were convened, including the required representatives as well as foster/adoptive parents and leaders of organizations representing them, advocates, and a juvenile justice representative.

Staffing and assistance: Not specified in legislation. Staff were made available through the Community Partnership of the Local Investment Commission (LINC) of Kansas City. Assistance included leadership support, expert facilitators, and a communication team that provided data analysis and documentation.

Oregon Governor's Child Foster Care Advisory Commission

www.oregon.gov/gov/policy/Pages/CFCAC.aspx

Authorizing legislation: 2016 HB 4080

<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2016R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB4080/Enrolled>

Purpose, goals, and scope: To study the issues within the Oregon foster care system, advise the Governor and the Director of Human Services, and make recommendations for legislation regarding:

(a) Legal and policy issues related to the foster care system;

(b) Monitoring accountability by measuring outcomes, including:

- Increasing the number of children committed to state custody who are placed with family members, relatives or next of kin;
- Decreasing the number of placements in foster care;
- Decreasing the length of time children spend in substitute care;
- Decreasing the incidence of maltreatment for children in substitute care;

- Increasing the number of children who receive permanent placements within 24 months of entering substitute care;
- Decreasing the number of children who, upon becoming ineligible for substitute care, have not achieved independent living status;
- Increasing the number of children who are placed with adoptive parents within 12 months of termination of the parental rights of a child's biological parents;
- Reducing demographic disproportionality in substitute care;
- Increasing the number of families involved in the foster care system receiving services and assistance to make it possible for children in substitute care to safely return home;
- Increasing the number of families involved in the foster care system having access to culturally relevant services;

(c) Necessary and recommended improvements to the internal operations of the department, including:

- Monitoring, licensing and supervision of foster care providers;
- Caseload management;
- Procedures for investigation of abuses and deficiencies;
- Recruitment, training and retention of foster parents; and
- Quality assurance;

(d) Recommendations to improve and expand the availability of foster care and, where applicable, to provide alternatives to foster care;

(e) Promotion of responsible statewide advocacy for children in foster care; and

(f) Ongoing review of foster care providers and identification of barriers to the provision of quality care and services to children in the foster care system.

Members: 11 members appointed by the Governor to four year terms. State residents with experience and expertise in the foster care system, including but not limited to:

- Foster and biological parents and children involved in the foster care system;
- Representatives of advocacy organizations for foster care system improvement;
- Representatives of public and private agencies and organizations that provide care to children in the foster care system;
- Attorneys with expertise in family and juvenile dependency law;
- Representatives of law enforcement agencies and district attorneys;
- Former employees of the state department of human services, state health department, and state department of justice who were responsible for the administration and oversight of the child welfare and foster care systems, including but not limited to former caseworkers and former court appointed special advocates;
- Representatives of the Judicial Department in consultation with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; and
- Representatives of tribes and organizations serving Native Americans.

Staffing and assistance: All agencies of state government, are directed to assist the commission to the extent permitted by law, including providing staff resources.

Pennsylvania Task Force on Child Protection

<http://www.childprotection.state.pa.us/about.cfm>

Created by the General Assembly in 2011 through SR 250 and HR 522.

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btCheck.cfm?txtType=PDF&sessYr=2011&sessInd=0&billBody=S&billTyp=R&billNbr=0250&pn=1846>

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/Legis/PN/Public/btCheck.cfm?txtType=PDF&sessYr=2011&sessInd=0&billBody=H&billTyp=R&billNbr=0522&pn=2876>

Expired December 2012.

Members:

- Six members knowledgeable and experienced in issues relating to child abuse or providing services to child abuse victims, including:
 - Three members appointed by the Senate President pro tempore, in consultation with the Senate Majority Leader and Minority Leader. One may be a member of the Senate.
 - Three members appointed by the Speaker of the House, in consultation with the House Majority Leader and Minority Leader. One may be a member of the House of Representatives.
- Four members appointed by the Governor:
 - One member of the general public
 - One member of a victim organization or a children and youth services organization who is directly involved in providing services to victims of child abuse.
 - One member experienced in the operation and interaction between a county children and youth agency and the Commonwealth.
 - A district attorney.
- The Secretary of Public Welfare or a designee who is a department employee.

Purpose, goals, and scope: To conduct a thorough and comprehensive review to:

- ascertain any inadequacies relating to the mandatory reporting of child abuse; and
- restore public confidence in the ability of the Commonwealth to protect the victims of child abuse (in the wake of the Sandusky sexual abuse case).

The task force had the following powers:

- Examine and analyze the practices, processes and procedures relating to the response to child abuse;
- Review and analyze law, procedures, practices and rules relating to the reporting of child abuse;
- Hold public hearings, accept and review written comments from individuals and organizations;
- Submit reports that include recommendations to improve the reporting of child abuse; implement any necessary changes in state laws and practices, policies and procedures relating to child abuse; and train appropriate individuals in the reporting of child abuse.

The task force held 17 public hearings and working sessions.

Its final report proposed a number of policy and statutory recommendations.

<http://www.childprotection.state.pa.us/Resources/press/2012-11-27%20Child%20Protection%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

Staffing and assistance: The Task Force was under the auspices of the General Assembly's Joint State Government Commission, the primary and central nonpartisan, bicameral research and policy development agency for the General Assembly. The Department of Public Welfare, the Joint State Government Commission, and the Juvenile Courts Judges'

Commission were directed to cooperatively provide administrative or other assistance to the task force.

For more information, contact:

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¹ Shafritz, J.M., Russell, E.W., Borick, C.P. (2000). *Introducing public administration, 8th edition*. New York: Longman.

² Shafritz, Russell, and Borick.

³ Robison, S. (2006). *State human services organization: Strategies for improving results*. Denver: National Conference of State Legislatures.