

Children's Services Committee

Location: **Nashville, TN**
Date: Thursday, 5/16/2025
Time: 2:45 P.M. CST

Staff Present: Richard Kennedy, Exec. Dir., Jeni Davis, Jerri Moore, Lindsey Cody, Kylie Graves, Dana Cobb, Melissa McGee, Steve Petty, Craig Hargrow, Bill Latimer, Carla Walker, Psasha Taylor, Russette Marcum - Mabry, Sujit Das, Wendy Pickering, Gabriella Smith, Cory Bradfield, Rob Burke, Jonquil Newland, Linda Copeland, Brian Jefferies, Marquita Moore, Therese Sipes, Jordan Walley.

Staff Absent:

Commission Members: Judge Robert Philyaw, Judge Sharon Green, Randy Butler, Raymond Jenkins, Brandon Smith, Billy Worsham, Matt Marshall, Tracey Silverman, Allan Sterbinsky, Charmaine Kromer, Ashley Dunkin, Jennifer Donnels, Elaina Francisco.

Commission Members Absent Amy Jones, T.J. King, Dr. Altha Smith, Ella Britt.

Guests:

- 1) **Call to Order – Randy Butler**
Butler began the meeting at 2:45 pm.
- 2) **Approval of November 2024 Children's Services Minutes (ACTION)**
Butler asked for a motion to approve the Children's Services minutes from the November 2024 Committee Meeting.

Worsham moved to approve the minutes from November 2024.

Jenkins seconded. *Unanimously Approved.*

Approval of February 2025 Children's Services Minutes (ACTION)

Butler asked for a motion to approve the Children's Services minutes from the February 2025 Committee Meeting.

Worsham moved to approve the minutes from February 2025.

Jenkins seconded. Unanimously Approved.

3) Staff Updates

Home Visiting Leadership Alliance (HVLA) - Rob Burke

The Home Visiting Leadership Alliance (HVLA) convened on April 25, 2025, with 58 attendees joining in person. The meeting focused on presentations from the Tennessee Department of Health, UT Martin Healthy Families, and Consilience Group covering updates on ongoing home visiting funding, workforce connections, and findings from the final evaluation of Tennessee Early Connect Project.

Why it matters: HVLA unites leadership from evidence-based home visiting programs, state departments, and stakeholders statewide to foster collaboration, information sharing, and professional development to bolster EBHV programs throughout Tennessee. These initiatives ultimately contribute to the enhancement of services provided, leading to improved outcomes for children and families.

Sustaining home visiting programs across Tennessee relies heavily on continued funding, but long-term sustainability also depends on each agency's ability to build on available resources. Strengthening support for the home visiting workforce is just as essential. When home visiting is sustained and scaled effectively, more children and families are served, which leads to better outcomes for those at risk and a stronger future for communities across the state

Below is a summary of key activities and impact from last quarter:

- **The Director of HVLA attended Blount County's Safe Baby Court Stakeholder 2-day training:**
 - *Why It Matters:* Attending this training deepens understanding of how local systems support families, especially with children ages 0-3, who are involved in the child welfare and judicial systems. This firsthand knowledge informs statewide home visiting strategy, strengthens alignment between prevention efforts and court-based interventions, and helps identify opportunities for home visiting programs to play a more proactive role in keeping families safely together.

- **The Director of the HVLA attended the UT SWORPS Strengthening Families Tennessee Conference:**
 - *Why It Matters:* Attending this conference allowed the HVLA Director to engage with statewide prevention leaders, gain insights on evidence-based approaches to family strengthening, and explore how home visiting can be better integrated into broader prevention strategies. This supports HVLA's mission to build a connected, responsive system that protects and empowers families before crises occur.
- **The Director of the HVLA is serving on the Child Care Board of Review:**
 - *Why It Matters:* Serving in this role reinforces HVLA's leadership in shaping early childhood systems in Tennessee. This appointment provides a critical opportunity to influence childcare policy and regulatory decisions that impact the quality and accessibility of care for young children. By bringing the home visiting perspective into childcare discussions, the Director helps bridge systems to create more aligned, family-centered supports. This cross-sector engagement strengthens collaboration across early childhood services and elevates HVLA's role in advancing integrated solutions that improve outcomes for children and families.

In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH), the Director of HVLA has developed and coordinated monthly Communities of Practice (COPs) for supervisors of evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) programs. These sessions aim to enhance leadership skills and support staff development. Time was allotted in the February and March CoPs for supervisors to provide peer support as each agency has a different way of addressing similar barriers. In the March meeting, the team discussed the effectiveness of HVLA meetings and how to augment its content for better outcomes.

Why it matters: Investing in professional development for EBHV program supervisors enhances their leadership skills, directly improving service delivery and outcomes for families. By fostering a supportive, collaborative community of leaders statewide, these sessions encourage the adoption of best practices and strengthen the collective impact of home visiting programs.

Ask of the Commission:

- As you are able, support efforts to diversify funding for EBHV programs across the state by advocating for increased state funding, identifying grant opportunities, or exploring investment options like social impact bonds.

- As you are able, advocate for evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) services by serving as a voice to policymakers, highlighting the impact and importance of these programs for families and communities.

HVLA has been scheduled for the remainder of 2025 as follows: 8/28/25 (virtual) and 11/13/25 (in person).

Tennessee Young Child Wellness Council - Rob Burke

The TNYCWC convened on February 27, 2025, for a hybrid meeting, with 87 total attendees. The meeting featured updates from the Tennessee Department of Health, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY), State of the Child presentation, and a facilitated discussion with attendees about how TNYCWC can become a more effective Early Childhood State Advisory Council.

Why it matters: This meeting brought together participants to deepen alignment, share critical updates, and strengthen the Council's role in statewide early childhood systems-building. Key reasons this gathering was significant include:

- **Elevating Statewide Insights and Child Well-Being Trends** – Presentations from the Tennessee Department of Health and the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth provided a timely look at current priorities, funding, data-driven insights, and opportunities that directly affect the early childhood landscape across Tennessee. This information equips Council members with the information needed to guide policy and practice.
- **Shaping the Future of the Council** – A facilitated discussion engaged attendees in reimagining how the TNYCWC can function more effectively as Tennessee's Early Childhood State Advisory Council. The conversation marked an important step in identifying next actions for governance, structure, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Driving Unified Action** – With cross-sector representation and state leadership in attendance, the meeting reinforced the Council's role as a collaborative hub to align early childhood efforts, reduce duplication, and drive systemic change on behalf of young children and their families

Since the initial State Advisory Council Symposium in October 2023, monthly Communities of Practice (CoPs) and bi-annual Symposiums have been hosted by the Director of TNYCWC.

At present, 30 different states/territories have actively participated: **Michigan, Ohio,**

New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Illinois, Oregon, Indiana, Tennessee, Connecticut, Alaska, Colorado, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Iowa, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, Idaho, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Hawai'i, Georgia, Utah, Massachusetts, and Arkansas.

Five other states have responded that they plan to attend in the future, including: **Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming.**

Why it matters: Continued support of a national collaborative of State Advisory Council leaders can have the following impacts:

- National collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Strengthened early childhood systems
- Increased impact of federal and state policies
- Building a national network of leaders
- Innovation and problem-solving

Below is a summary of key activities and impact from last quarter:

- The Director of the TNYCWC assisted in the planning and execution of Children's Advocacy Days, Day 1 Advocacy Training.
 - *Why It Matters:* Nearly 200 individuals from diverse cross-sector organizations received training from both policy advocacy experts and lived-experience leaders, strengthening their skills to more effectively champion the needs of children.
- The Director of the TNYCWC continues to attend the Child Well-Being Leadership Academy, was nominated to apply for the Leadership Tennessee NEXT Academy, and was recruited to serve on the Board of Directors of HOLA Lakeway.
 - *Why It Matters:* Continued investment in leadership development strengthens the impact and credibility of the TNYCWC's work. These opportunities not only expand the Council's network and influence, but also position the Director—and by extension, the Council—to drive more effective, equity-focused systems change for young children and families across Tennessee.
- The Director of the TNYCWC attended several conferences, webinars, facilitated discussions about how to best support systems and children in the current climate.
 - *Why It Matters:* Engagement in national and local conversations

ensures the TNYCWC remains responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities facing children and families. These have allowed opportunities to gather timely insights and contribute Tennessee's voice to broader systems-change efforts. This ongoing engagement strengthens the Council's ability to lead with relevance, adapt strategies, and advocate effectively for policies that improve outcomes for young children across the state.

Ask of the Commission:

Any of the following support, in accordance with your availability and expertise, will be appreciated:

- Facilitate stronger partnerships for child well-being by inviting representatives from DCS, TennCare, and a legislative contact to join the TNYCWC Steering Committee, ensuring alignment of efforts across agencies.

What's next?

The Director of the TNYCWC is working to establish Regional Roundtable sites to host in-person meetings. Efforts have been made to connect with partners from Memphis and Chattanooga and additional conversations are planned. Below are the currently scheduled meeting dates for the remainder of the year.

- **9/25/25-** Ed Jones Auditorium at Ellington Agricultural Center
- **12/11/25- TBD**

Resilient Tennessee Collaborative - Melissa McGee

The Resilient Tennessee Collaborative first quarterly networking meeting was held on February 26th and hosted Ben Tanzer with The Montana Institute. Tanzer introduced TMI's Science of the Positive research and the evidence-based protocol of building Positive Community Norms. Tanzer's visit to Nashville was sponsored by Centerstone. There were 50 in-person attendees and 51 virtual attendees at the meeting.

As RTC continues to support communities in building healthy development environments and activities for kids and families, the third annual Resilient Tennessee Statewide Summit will be held on May 21st in Nashville, with watch parties in Jackson, Chattanooga and Knoxville. The Summit will focus on supporting strong children and families through building strong communities. We will hear from national leaders, statewide efforts and local/regional work that support kids and families in all different ways.

- *Why it matters:* We were excited to welcome Tanzer to Nashville to help build on the foundational work of Building Strong Brains Tennessee and now Resilient Tennessee Collaborative, focusing on building strong communities that support kids and families. Tanzer's visit established a baseline for him to return to Nashville at the upcoming Resilient Tennessee Collaborative Statewide Summit in May, where he will return to work with attendees on putting the Positive Community Norms protocol into action. His return visit is also sponsored by Centerstone.

Building Strong Foundations Training for Trainers – March 4th & 5th

- *Why It Matters:* As part of Resilient Tennessee Collaborative, we partner with our regional coordinators to bring information into their region. In 2024, we held grand region summits, and our West TN Regional Summit revisited the historical work of Building Strong Brains Tennessee and the important education on healthy early childhood development. This year, the West Regional Coordinators sought to increase their number of trained persons to talk about this issue and requested a T4T. We conducted a one time training to continue to support the rebuilding of their base of trainers in West TN and had about 40 attendees, including Commission member, Billy Worsham.

RTC 2025 West Tennessee Regional Summit – April 24th

- *Why It Matters:* We returned to West Tennessee to host the 2025 West Regional Summit, where the planning team chose to focus on highlight the Five Protective Factors. The Summit was a full day, had 152 in attendance and was well received through evaluations returned. The team also acknowledged that attendees may benefit from information about compassion fatigue and how to maintain wellness in their work. Dr. Dustin Keller provided an overview of compassion fatigue, Karen Vega-Romero reviewed the basics of the Five Protective Factors, various service providers provided an in-depth look at each protective factor, and Dr. Keller followed up on each one with a related factor of personal wellness.

Resilient Tennessee Collaborative Statewide Summit – May 21st

- *Why It Matters:* This upcoming Summit allows wide exposure for statewide attendees to learn how to further engage strong community building to support kids and families.

In February, TCCY was contacted by JBS International, a SAMHSA technical assistance contractor, to partner with them to provide training for the Single State Authorities who

receive funding for the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Block Grant from SAMSHA. TCCY will provide information on mental health, childhood development, adversity and resilience, while TAADAS will provide topics related to substance treatment and recovery. The training will be held on two date ranges, one for continental US participants, and one for Pacific Jurisdiction participants.

McGee was invited to teach a class at MTSU on early childhood development to student teachers on March 31st as part of their training.

McGee attended the Strengthening Families conference in Knoxville, sponsored by DCS and UT SWORPS. She was able to attend valuable sessions and network with partners from across the state.

McGee continues to be part of the Tennessee Safe Baby Court Onboarding team, providing presentations on healthy early childhood development, positive childhood experiences, resiliency, and compassion fatigue. She participated in onboarding for Blount County Safe Baby Court in April. McGee has been invited by the Administrative Office of the Courts to join the team in Portland, OR, for the Zero to Three Safe Baby Courts national conference.

McGee also continues to participate in the various groups across the state supporting children and families.

TCCY renewed their partnership with Best Place for Working Parents and McGee continues to identify opportunity to broaden that reach.

Why it matters: These key partnerships allow TCCY to continue to be at the forefront of improving systems serving kids and families across the state

If you have opportunity to promote further engagement with and reach to business sector statewide regarding family-friendly workplace policies, please reach out.

Please share any identification of communication outlets sharing child/family related information within Tennessee in effort to work on tailored messaging to raise awareness about related topics.

Resilient Tennessee Collaborative Statewide Summit – May 21st – Register [here](#) for in person or watch party attendance. Watch parties will be held in Knoxville, Chattanooga, Jackson.

Youth Transitions Advisory Council (YTAC) - Jordan Walley

YTAC plays a crucial role in tackling the various challenges that young people face as they move from foster care or the juvenile justice system into adulthood. YTAC works with important partners, including government agencies, community organizations, and advocacy groups, to create and implement strategies that improve support networks, resources, and opportunities for these young people. By encouraging open conversations, sharing successful practices, and making policy recommendations, YTAC aims to equip transitioning youth with the tools and support they need to succeed and thrive in their adult lives.

The Youth Transitions Advisory Council (YTAC) held its first meeting of 2025 on March 6 at Lentz Public Health Center, with approximately 42 participants attending in a hybrid format. The agenda included regular updates from the Department of Children's Services (DCS) Office of Independent Living, Youth Villages LifeSet, and the state's Resource Centers. The new director of Every Child TN also introduced themselves and shared updates on the program. While the Tennessee Housing Development Agency's (THDA) Housing Education Training Coordinator was scheduled to present, time constraints delayed the presentation, which will be rescheduled for a future meeting. THDA plans to share information on funding opportunities for housing counseling and rental education services.

2025 YTAC Meeting Schedule:

- June 5 – Monroe Harding Resource Center
- August 14
- October 2

All meetings are open to the public.

In 2025, YTAC and the Council on Children's Mental Health (CCMH) will not hold their traditional joint June meeting. Instead, YTAC is exploring new ways to increase engagement—most notably, by hosting meetings at local Resource Centers. This change aims to spotlight the essential work of these centers, offer them a platform to share their efforts, and strengthen collaboration with YTAC. Holding meetings on-site also gives members a direct view of the challenges and successes these organizations face. This initiative supports YTAC's recommendation to increase Resource Center presence

in rural areas and enhances statewide efforts to improve youth mental health and transition services.

The next meeting, on June 5 at Monroe Harding's Resource Center, will include updates from TCCY and DCS, including news on foster care system expansion. THDA will present on housing-related programs, and the agenda will feature young adults with lived experience who have benefited from Monroe Harding's services. In preparation for the 2025 YTAC report, the Council will review progress on recommendations from the 2024 report.

During the 114th Tennessee General Assembly session, Jordan Walley provided support to the Executive and Deputy Executive Directors by managing legislative responsibilities in the absence of a TCCY staff member. He coordinated meetings with lawmakers, attended committee hearings, tracked priority legislation, and delivered timely updates to ensure TCCY's interests were well represented. He also played a key role in planning the first day of Children's Advocacy Days, organizing a legislative panel for roughly 200 child advocates, which featured a Q&A with two state senators moderated by a lobbyist and former Commission member.

Walley continues to be actively engaged in statewide and community efforts supporting youth transitioning out of foster care. He participates in Health Councils, the Knoxville Adolescent Partners in Prevention Initiative (KAPPI), the Injury Prevention Coalition, DCS's Spotlight on Youth, and initiatives led by Every Child TN. He is also building strong partnerships with organizations and stakeholders working to improve outcomes for youth leaving the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Walley presented on YTAC and CCMH-related legislation during MCCY's Policies and Practices Lunch and Learn and remains involved in TCCY's Leadership Academy cohort, having completed two virtual sessions and attended the second Leadership Retreat at Fall Creek Falls, where he collaborated with peers from across the state.

Council on Children's Mental Health (CCMH) - Jordan Walley

The Council on Children's Mental Health (CCMH) was established as a collaborative effort between the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) and the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY) to support and develop a comprehensive statewide system of care. CCMH fosters community engagement and networking statewide, while also overseeing the Systems of Care Across Tennessee (SOCAT) initiative in partnership with TDMHSAS.

The Council on Children's Mental Health (CCMH) held its first quarterly meeting of 2025 on February 6, prior to the most recent Commission meeting. Planning for the upcoming CCMH meeting on June 5 is already underway. Traditionally, this meeting has been a joint session with YTAC; however, due to changes in funding and structure, the meetings will be separate in 2025. The first portion of the June meeting will focus on bringing together the statutorily required members to provide an overview of CCMH's purpose and history, update members on the renewed charge of the Council, and begin discussions around the annual report. The second half of the meeting will follow the typical CCMH format, with updates from TCCY and TDMHSAS. Sycamore Institute will present the findings from their report, which led to the legislation requiring CCMH to produce an annual report (SB1342/HB1169). Presentations from TDMHSAS's Planning and Policy Council and its Children's Committee will also highlight opportunities for collaboration in preparing the annual report and advancing CCMH's objectives. As always, CCMH meetings are open to anyone interested in participating. The 2025 meeting schedule is as follows:

- June 5 – MNPD West Precinct
- September 18
- November 20 – Ed Jones at Ellington Agricultural Center

On March 3, Jordan Walley presented on CCMH legislation at the Urban Child Institute's Child Mental Health Working Group, which led to follow-up meetings with representatives from Children's Hospital Alliance Tennessee, Le Bonheur, and St. Jude's Hospital. Walley continues to participate in TCCY's Leadership Academy cohort, having completed two virtual sessions and the second Leadership Retreat at Fall Creek Falls, where he had the opportunity to collaborate and network with statewide leaders. During the recent 114th Tennessee General Assembly session, Walley supported the Executive and Deputy Executive Directors by assisting with the management of legislative responsibilities in the absence of a TCCY staff member. He scheduled and attended meetings with General Assembly members, committee meetings, tracked key legislation, and provided regular updates to ensure TCCY's priorities were well-represented. Additionally, Walley helped in planning and executing the first day of Children's Advocacy Days, coordinating a legislative panel for approximately 200 child advocates. Attendees had the opportunity to engage in a Q&A session with two state senators, moderated by a lobbyist and former Commission member.

Walley remains actively engaged in both community and statewide meetings supporting children's mental health in Tennessee. His involvement includes participating in the Statewide Policy and Planning Council, Mental Health Collaborative, Anderson County Health Council, Knoxville Adolescent Partners in Prevention Initiative (KAPPI), Injury Prevention Coalition, Children's Council, Suicide Prevention Advisory Group, Integrated Community Agency Meeting (ICAM), and AIMHiTN meetings. Walley also participated in events such as MCCY's Policies and Practices Lunch and Learn, where he provided updates on CCMH, including legislation related to the required annual report.

Second Look Commission Kylie Graves

The Second Look Commission had its Sunset Hearing before the Government Operations Joint Subcommittee on Health, Education and General Welfare on October 14th. The Committee recommended a four year reauthorization

The Comptroller's Audit of the Second Look Commission was released on October 13th. There were two findings which have been addressed.

- Finding 1: Commission member vacancies and attendance issues and the resulting lack of member engagement may hinder the commission's effective review of child abuse cases and may delay efforts to improve the state's response to severe child abuse.
- Finding 2: Management did not ensure that all commission members and designees completed the applicable required confidentiality and conflict-of-interest documentation.

The Second Look Commission will meet on November 12th and December 10th to finalize the annual report findings and recommendations.

4) Additional Items or Comments