

MINUTES
Approved by the Committee
Child Protection Legislative Oversight Committee
Wednesday, February 22, 2023
3:00 P.M.
Room WW54
Boise, Idaho

Members in attendance: Cochairs Senator Abby Lee and Representative Brandon Mitchell; Senators Kelly Arthur Anthon, Melissa Wintrow, and Linda Wright Hartgen; Representatives Jason Monks, Lauren Necochea, and Clay Handy. Legislative Services Office (LSO) staff present: Elizabeth Bowen and Baylie Moore.

Other attendees: Brian McCauley, Chair of the Region IV Citizen Review Panel (CRP); Valerie McCauley, Hand in Hand Family Mentorship (HHFM); Jessica Ruehrwein, District Director of Safe Families for Children (SFCP); Chalyce Hurt, Foster Alumna and Former Chair of the Idaho Foster Youth Advisory Board; Charlye Hahn, Idaho Relatives as Parents (IRP).

NOTE: presentations and materials distributed to members are posted to the Legislature's website: <https://legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2022/interim/cplo/> and copies of those items are on file with the Legislative Services Offices located in the State Capitol. Video of this meeting is also available on the website.

Cochair Lee called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m.; a silent roll call was taken. All members, staff, and presenters attended in person.

Citizens Review Panel Update

Cochair Lee recognized Brian McCauley, Chair of Region IV's CRP. Mr. McCauley explained how the CRP is currently functioning and discussed key areas of focus in the CRP. These key areas included: laws and policies, the culture in the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW), and technology and data. Cochair Lee expressed her appreciation towards Mr. McCauley's care and concern for these children.

- Senator Anthon asked if, when the CRP reviews cases in which they find methamphetamine in a home, that is enough to prompt the DHW to intervene. Mr. McCauley stated that the use of illicit drugs in a home where a child is present is not enough to remove a child from the home. If the use of illicit drugs puts the child in harm's way or if the child is directly exposed to illicit drugs, presumably, the DHW would consider acting upon this. Mr. McCauley stated that it was difficult for him to understand that people could be engaged in illegal behavior in their home in front of a child and that might not be enough for the DHW to consider the home dangerous. Senator Anthon agreed with Mr. McCauley's statements.
- Senator Wintrow thanked Mr. McCauley for his passion and commitment. She mentioned how there is confusion on what the CRP's authority is, and encouraged the committee to alleviate this confusion as lawmakers. Senator Wintrow also stated possibly expanding the CRP to have more oversight. She then asked for a bullet list of all the issues Mr. McCauley mentioned today. Mr. McCauley discussed his bullet list, which included: empowering the CRP to do more, clarification on the scope of CRPs, and inviting the committee members to attend the CRP's upcoming meeting.

Foster Care Diversion Programs

Cochair Lee introduced Valerie McCauley to the committee. Ms. McCauley gave the committee background information on the HHFM program, and where the program is currently. She stated that the preventative piece of the HHFM program is the most important part of the program, and she explained how the preventative aspect works. Mrs. McCauley then mentioned how the HHFM

program sends its mentees newsletters every month to inspire them on ways to connect with people. She also stated that there are classes for the mentees, such as a money revolution class the first week of March that will help families with money issues.

Cochair Lee introduced Jessica Ruehrwein to the committee. Ms. Ruehrwein explained the SFCP, what it does, and how it functions. She mentioned how SFCP has already served 80 families in Idaho since 2021 when this program was first introduced. Ms. Ruehrwein stated that each family has a family coach and that it recruits coaches from churches. She noted major differences, as well as similarities, between SFCP and foster care, noting that one of the most significant differences is that the parents never lose custody of their children. Right now, there are twenty available host homes with eighteen more awaiting approval, and there are 150 screened volunteers for SFCP.

- Cochair Lee requested a copy of the newsletter that Ms. McCauley mentioned. Cochair Lee asked if the HHFM program receives any funding from DHW. Ms. McCauley stated that she was volunteering, but this January she received her first paycheck. Before that, HHFM employees functioned off family donations, as well as a donation from a family trust in the valley, and a donation given to HHFM from Boise Cascade. She also stated that HHFM met with the DHW to work on a donation that they will be contributing to HHFM.
- Cochair Lee thanked Ms. Ruehrwein for bringing SFCP to Idaho and for doing such a great job with the program. Cochair Lee said last year the Legislature updated a statute because the FBI wanted to add temporary family caregivers to the statute and to allow background checks; she mentioned the statute did indicate that the DHW may charge for the background checks. Cochair Lee mentioned her discussion with DHW about encouraging these families to get background checks and eliminating the fee of background checks for these families. Ms. Ruehrwein thanked Cochair Lee and the committee for its efforts, specifically in eliminating the fee for these background checks. Cochair Lee mentioned that the Legislature was able to expand foster care up to the age of twenty-one.

Transitioning Out of Foster Care and Into Adulthood

Cochair Lee introduced Chalyce Hurt to the committee. Ms. Hurt gave the committee background information on her experience within the foster care system. She stated that she did not receive the care and resources she needed, specifically relating to her mental health. Ms. Hurt suggested that this committee should create legislation making mental health screening mandatory when entering the foster care system as a child.

- Cochair Lee stated her appreciation to Ms. Hurt for opening the committee's eyes to teenagers and their experiences in the foster care system as well as the resources that these children needed.

Kinship in Families in Idaho

Cochair Lee introduced Charlye Hahn to the committee. Ms. Hahn discussed Idaho Relatives as Parents (IRP), the support group she is representing. She mentioned the statistic that, in Idaho, for every one child in foster care there are seventeen children in kinship care. Ms. Hahn wants more funding so that IRP can enrich the lives of these kinship families.

- Cochair Lee asked if Ms. Hahn could explain what the meetings with these parents is like. Ms. Hahn gave the committee some examples.

After closing remarks, the committee adjourned at 4:30 p.m.