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Children's Cabinet Meeting Unapproved Minutes February 6, 2025

Members Present

Commissioner Taylor Barras represented by Sonia Mallett
Superintendent Dr. Cade Brumley represented by Sabre Masters
Simone Champagne, BESE
Secretary Michael Harrington, Louisiana Department of Health, represented by Tangela Womack
Secretary Kenneth "Kenny" Loftin, Office of Juvenile Justice
Secretary David N. Matlock, Department of Children and Family Services
Susana Schowen, Louisiana Workforce Commission represented by Jim Garvey
Senator Regina Barrow

Staff:

Ursula Anderson for Jolie Williamson
Michele Rabalais, LCTF/CC Exec. Assistant

Call to Order:

Ursula Anderson, Children's Trust Fund Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m. and welcomed members and guests.

Roll Call:

Michele M. Rabalais, Executive Assistant, called roll.

Approval of Minutes: Secretary Kenneth "Kenny" Loftin moved for approval of the June 11th and October 21st minutes as presented. Tangela Womack seconded the motion.

Louisiana Supreme Court Truancy Summit Collaboration: During the meeting, Storm Ehlers, Deputy Judicial Administrator for the Division of Children and Families at the Louisiana Supreme Court, addressed the group, stepping in on behalf of Chief Justice Weimer and Rashawn Saul, the FINS program manager. She announced that the Supreme Court, in collaboration with the Children's Cabinet, BESE, and other stakeholders, is working toward hosting another truancy-focused summit, similar to one held two years ago. A work group meeting on the topic was scheduled immediately after the session, and Storm encouraged those interested to participate.

Judge Grover of the East Baton Rouge Juvenile Court then took the floor, emphasizing the significance of addressing truancy and absenteeism across the state. She advocated for reviving the previous **Solution Summit**, which had brought together key stakeholders—from education, law enforcement, and child welfare—to tackle these issues collaboratively. She highlighted the summit's success in fostering partnerships, identifying regional strengths and weaknesses, and generating innovative approaches to support families. The gathering had also provided an opportunity for follow-up collaboration and data-driven accountability through organizations like the Pelican Center.

Judge Grover stressed that solving truancy challenges requires intentional, coordinated efforts rather than isolated actions. She called upon the group to support hosting another summit, noting that Chief Justice Weimer had already engaged BESE Board members, who expressed willingness to collaborate. However, funding and logistical support would be necessary to move forward.

Following her remarks, Jeff Powell, a superintendent, joined the discussion remotely, though technical difficulties made his comments difficult to hear. Nonetheless, it was confirmed that he emphasized the importance of statewide collaboration and offered his district as a potential central location for the summit.

Storm concluded by reaffirming the Supreme Court's commitment to truancy prevention efforts, noting their ongoing collaboration with the FINS Association. She shared that Chief Justice Weimer and other court representatives would also be presenting at an upcoming conference for FINS officers and other stakeholders involved in truancy intervention. In closing, she echoed Judge Grover's call for support, emphasizing the value of bringing all engaged parties together in one space to develop actionable solutions.

Secretary David Matlock asked Judge Gail Grover to head the planning subcommittee for the summit.

Calcasieu Parish Police Jury CYPB's: Anthony Celestine, Director, Office of Juvenile Justice Services presented information regarding the Calcasieu Parish CYPB. He began by providing a historical overview of the Planning Board, explaining its formation following the enactment of Act 555 and emphasizing the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in sustaining its work. He highlighted the early support received from philanthropic organizations, including the MacArthur and Casey Foundations, which provided crucial funding to help establish and guide the board's objectives. As mandated by Act 555 of 2004, The Calcasieu Parish Children and Youth Planning Board was established by resolution of the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury on January 6th, 2005.

The mission of the Calcasieu CYPB is to identify and support effective programs, initiatives, and activities that promote the social, physical, and emotional well-being of children and youth in our community.

To accomplish their mission and vision, CYPB must:

- Promote and support preventive and intervention strategies to maximize children and youth development.
- Engage all sectors as partners.
- View children, youth, and their families as change agents and partners.
- Reduce and divert commitment of children and youth into the juvenile justice and foster care systems.
- Provide community awareness and education on prevention, education, and resources on behalf of our children and youth.

Anthony Celestine outlined key initiatives that have been instrumental in the board's success. One significant achievement is the creation of the Children & Youth Planning Board website, a resource hub listing services available to youth and families in the community. Another major initiative is the Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC), established in 2008 as a single point of entry for early intervention and diversion services. MARC plays a critical role in addressing truancy, school-related conflicts, and other youth issues by working collaboratively with juvenile judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, and school officials to provide early support and prevent system involvement.

Addressing past challenges, Mr. Celestine acknowledged that attendance and engagement had declined over time. To counter this, the board implemented strategic adjustments, including shifting meeting times to better accommodate participants and revising membership to focus on committed stakeholders. These efforts have led to improved participation and continued momentum in the board's work. The board remains actively involved in several community initiatives, such as combating human trafficking, addressing the opioid crisis, and supporting various juvenile justice programs.

Mr. Celestine also highlighted the upcoming Mardi Gras Zone, an annual family-friendly, alcohol- and drug-free event along the parade route, now in its 16th year. This event provides a safe space for families and children to enjoy the festivities, featuring activities such as video games, mini-golf, train rides, and refreshments. Additionally, the board continues to support juvenile justice efforts, truancy intervention, and youth outreach programs in collaboration with local organizations.

Before concluding, Chairman Celestine invited attendees to the next Planning Board meeting, scheduled for **March 6 at 10:30 AM** at the **Calcasieu Parish Office of Juvenile Justice Services**. He encouraged continued collaboration and networking among stakeholders.

Magnolia Children's Group: Dr. Christian Vige' expressed gratitude to Miss Williamson for the opportunity to present and for her dedication to the Children's Cabinet. He introduced Magnolia Children's Group, an emerging initiative aimed at unifying agencies that work with families and children. Describing it as a preliminary but promising concept, Christian shared the vision of creating a collaborative space to enhance child welfare services.

The initiative's mission, "*Restore history while rebuilding futures*," seeks to repurpose historic properties to establish a facility that provides child welfare, reunification, and family services. By leveraging the state's architectural assets—many of which are currently underutilized—this model aims to create a space where agencies can work together to better support children and families.

Christian emphasized that this initiative is not intended to replace existing services but to enhance and integrate them more effectively. He highlighted the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration, ensuring that efforts across the state align in a way that best serves children in need. He invited those present to share their thoughts and engage in shaping the initiative, either during the meeting or afterward.

Throughout the discussion, enthusiasm for the initiative was evident, with attendees recognizing its potential to make a meaningful impact. Dr. Vige' encouraged continued dialogue, inviting feedback and ideas from stakeholders to ensure the initiative moves forward in harmony with existing efforts.

Health Freedom Louisiana: Jill Hines, Co-Director of Health Freedom Louisiana, expressed her gratitude to Miss Williamson for the opportunity to speak and acknowledged the work of the Children's Cabinet. She provided an overview of Health Freedom Louisiana, an organization she co-founded with Ashley Houston and Fiorella Trepani. Their advocacy work emerged in response to national trends in vaccine mandates, including the removal of religious exemptions in several states and the introduction of government-controlled medical exemptions.

Hines highlighted key legislative concerns that spurred their efforts, including Louisiana's 2019 law tracking adult vaccinations, which she viewed as a potential precursor to vaccine passports. Health Freedom Louisiana advocates for consumer and human rights, emphasizing voluntary informed consent in medical decisions. Hines recounted her personal experience as a parent who was not fully informed about vaccines, citing concerns about liability protections for manufacturers, lack of placebo-controlled trials, and the presence of various vaccine ingredients.

She referenced studies and reports questioning vaccine safety, including the 1986 National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act, which removed liability from vaccine manufacturers while acknowledging the risk of vaccine injuries. She also discussed concerns regarding the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and the underreporting of vaccine-related injuries. Hines pointed to correlations between rising vaccine doses and increased chronic illnesses among children, challenging statements that vaccines do not cause autism. She referenced public records requests made to Louisiana health officials, questioning the validity of their claims on vaccine safety.

Concluding her presentation, Hines underscored the need for parental awareness and opposition to medical mandates. She emphasized Louisiana law, which allows parents to submit a written dissent instead of vaccination records for school attendance, ensuring that vaccinations remain a choice rather than a requirement.

Children's Cabinet Advisory Board Budget Recommendations: ReShonn Saul, CCAB Chair, was unable to attend. Recommendations will be presented at a later time.

Approval of New CCAB Members: The board addressed the statutory requirement for two parent members on the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board to be approved by the Children's Cabinet. A request was made for a motion to approve their appointments. The motion was put forward and seconded, formally approving **Brooke Lafleur** and **Julio Gallon** as new advisory members.

Approval of Solutions Summit: The board proceeded with a vote on approving the Truancy Solutions Summit, as previously presented by Judge Grover and Storm Ehlers. A motion was made to support the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board in moving forward with planning the summit, which was seconded and approved.

Other Business: None

Public Comments: None

Next Meeting: April 3, 2025