



March 25, 2026

Lincoln Arneal
Nebraska Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Annual Report and Recommendations 2024–2025

Dear Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel Members,

Children & Family Services (CFS) sincerely appreciates the time and effort you have invested in providing valuable recommendations to enhance Nebraska's child welfare system. Your feedback helps us improve the safety, well-being, and permanency for the children and families CFS serves. This year's report contained a substantial number of recommendations. Given this volume, CFS is focusing our response on the key recommendations for which action has been taken or is feasible at this time.

Recommendation #1: Parental Support

The Panel's recommendations included expanding home visitation, providing clear pathways to community resources, peer support with lived experience, and support groups to help parents balance caregiving and employment.

CFS is dedicated to enhancing services and supports for parents to help families thrive. With the implementation of the federal Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), CFS expanded its service array with several evidence-based programs and has continued expanding services and availability across the state. Regarding home visitation, CFS expanded home visiting through programs such as Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers. In compliance with Senator Storer's Legislative Bill 903, currently on Final Reading, CFS will continue to refer eligible families with a child age two or younger for evidence-based home visitation services, and families with a child age three or younger for early intervention services.

CFS prioritizes primary prevention, assisting families before formal system intervention, such as by partnering with local community partners to provide families with easy access to vital resources before a crisis occurs. CFS also continues to build partnerships with contracted agencies to provide services for families to help mitigate the reasons for their system involvement. Many organizations offer services such as Family Support, Intensive Family Preservation (IFP), and Intensive Family Reunification (IFR) directly in the home, helping parents enhance their parenting skills. Many of these organizations also offer evidence-based support groups, such as Circle of Security-Parenting (COS-P), which strengthen the attachment between parents and children.



Family Peer Support is available to all families in Nebraska by calling the Family Helpline. This service connects families with Family Navigator Services, which provide peer support from individuals who have personal experience. These navigators assist families in accessing various services, including mental and behavioral health support. Additionally, CFS continues to fund Peer-to-Peer Mentoring through Family-Run Organizations, which support parents engaged in court-involved and non-court-involved cases to overcome barriers and strengthen their well-being.

Lastly, CFS is dedicated to understanding and listening to the voices of those we serve and incorporating that feedback into our workforce and service array. In Nebraska, youth and caretakers involved with child welfare have access to the Family Advocacy Unit. A family advocate can offer support and assistance to families navigating the system.

Recommendation #2: Cultural Needs

The Panel's recommendations included the establishment of a dedicated cultural team, ongoing cultural competency training, partnerships with tribes and cultural organizations, and ensuring community connections to maintain the cultural heritage of children in foster care.

CFS agrees that preserving cultural identity is a key component of a child's well-being and family reunification. CFS continues to use the Family Finding model to locate relative and kinship placements first, maximizing the chance that the home shares the child's cultural background.

CFS also collaborates with Child Placing Agencies to recruit foster families in Nebraska's highest removal zip codes, specifically for Indigenous children placed in non-relative homes. This initiative aims to ensure that children stay connected to their hometowns, helping them maintain access to similar traditions, language, and places of worship in familiar environments.

CFS has a dedicated Tribal Program Team that focuses on compliance with federal and state laws under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and on strengthening relationships with Nebraska tribes. Through the Together for Indigenous Families grant, DHHS is increasing the licensing of tribal foster homes and enhancing prevention efforts to keep Indigenous children connected to their communities and cultures.

Recommendation #3: System Issues (Training, Accountability, and Safety)

The Panel's recommendations included improvements in training, communication of parents' rights, the creation of safe spaces for youth in crisis, a secure app or hotline for children to report mistreatment and publishing anonymized data on abuse/neglect allegations in foster homes.

CFS has recently implemented the Safe, Timely, Accelerated, Results (STAR) model statewide, which supports existing case management activities by utilizing case mappings and a Conditions for Return (CFR) tool. The CFR provides the parent(s) with specific conditions that must be met for a child to return home safely.



As of January 2025, CFS launched an enhanced New Worker Training model emphasizing experiential learning. Case managers participate in a comprehensive 12-week blended learning program that includes self-paced online modules, field shadowing, and instructor-led sessions. This program stresses role-playing and hands-on learning with experienced case managers.

Regarding parents' rights, CFS partnered with Family Organizations to create an online Family Guidebook. CFS also encourages case managers to share the guidebook with families, which details parents' rights, what they can expect, and contact details for their caseworkers. These resources are written in straightforward language and provided at crucial moments during their involvement with the system. When parents or youth believe policy/procedures, statutes, or regulations have been violated, they can file a grievance as outlined on our public website. A Grievance Specialist works with the family and case management team to provide guidance and support to resolve the concerns presented. If the grievant wishes to remain anonymous, the Grievance Specialist can still address their concerns; however, because these concerns are usually case-specific, this can be difficult.

Regarding safe places, youth in Nebraska who are facing a mental health crisis can access the Mobile Crisis Response program. This service offers immediate, community-based support, without involving law enforcement, whenever possible. Specifically the recommendation that CFS should not utilize detention for youth in crisis, CFS does not utilize detention, but probation does.

DHHS regularly publishes child welfare data on our public website, including the outcome measure of the absence of maltreatment in foster care (<https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/CFS-Data-and-Reports.aspx>). CFS leadership, in partnership with other staff, routinely reviews data to identify trends and drive improvements.

A hotline for reporting mistreatment, child abuse, or neglect should be reported to 1-800-652-1999 or can be reported online at <https://neabusehotline-dhhs.ne.gov/>.

CFS is committed to addressing the challenges identified by the Panel and to continuously improving Nebraska's child welfare system. CFS values the ongoing partnership with the Parent and Caregiver Citizen Review Panel and looks forward to continuing this vital work together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Alyssa Bish
Director of Children and Family Services
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services