



LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S CABINET  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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# **2025 Children's Cabinet Annual Report**

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**LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S CABINET**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

January 30, 2026

Governor Jeff Landry  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 94004  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Dear Governor Landry,

I am pleased to formally submit the 2025 Children's Cabinet Annual Report to the Office of the Governor in accordance with R.S. 46:2603.

This report highlights the collaborative work, progress, and priorities of the Children's Cabinet throughout 2025 and reflects our continued commitment to strengthening outcomes for Louisiana's children and families. It provides a comprehensive overview of cross-agency efforts addressing early childhood development, child welfare, behavioral and mental health services, education, family stability, and statewide child safety and prevention initiatives.

In addition to documenting accomplishments, the report outlines key challenges and offers strategic recommendations to further advance coordinated, data-informed solutions that support the well-being and long-term success of Louisiana's youngest citizens. These recommendations are grounded in the expertise of our partner agencies and stakeholders and are intended to inform future policy discussions and decision-making.

We are grateful for your leadership and continued support of the Children's Cabinet and its mission. Your commitment to collaboration and accountability across state government remains vital to ensuring Louisiana's children and families have the opportunity to thrive.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss the contents of this report in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your ongoing dedication to the children and families of Louisiana.

Respectfully,

For Louisiana,

Jolie V. Williamson



**LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S CABINET**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

January 30, 2026

The Honorable Members  
Senate and House Health and Welfare Committee  
P.O. Box 94183  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Dear Members of the House and Senate Health and Welfare Committees,

I am writing to formally submit the 2025 Children's Cabinet Annual Report to the Louisiana House and Senate Health and Welfare Committees in accordance with R.S. 46:2603.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Children's Cabinet's work throughout 2025 and reflects our continued commitment to improving outcomes for Louisiana's children and families through coordinated, cross-agency collaboration. It highlights progress and key initiatives across early childhood development, child welfare, education, behavioral and mental health services, family stability, and statewide child safety and prevention efforts.

In addition to outlining accomplishments, the report identifies emerging challenges and includes strategic recommendations intended to inform legislative discussion and support evidence-based policy decisions that advance the well-being of Louisiana's youngest citizens.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued partnership and leadership in addressing the needs of children and families across our state. Your ongoing support is essential to sustaining collaborative efforts that strengthen families, improve service delivery, and promote long-term positive outcomes for children.

Should you require any additional information or wish to discuss the contents of this report further, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your steadfast commitment to the children and families of Louisiana.

For Louisiana,

Jolie V. Williamson





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## **LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S CABINET**

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#### **Executive Summary**

The Children's Cabinet was created by the Legislature in 1992 to identify best practices, align, and coordinate funding resources on behalf of children and families statewide. Furthermore, the cabinet was designed to facilitate coordination and delivery of policy, planning, and budget issues affecting programs and services for children and their families; and to eliminate duplication of services where appropriate. In 2025, the Executive Director of the Children's Cabinet provided oversight and leadership for the following entities: 1) Children's Cabinet, 2) Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB), 3) Children and Youth Planning Boards, 4) The Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, and 5) the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF).

Governor Jeff Landry appointed Jolie V. Williamson to lead the Children's Cabinet on January 8, 2024. Ms. Jolie Williamson, a former public-school teacher, and volunteer has been a long-term advocate for children and families and brings a wealth of passion and skills to her new role.

This report includes a summary of activities performed by each of the above entities, Boards and Commissions during the year 2025. The full report for the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund will be submitted separately as written by statute.

Please contact the new Executive Director of the Children's Cabinet via email at [Jolie.williamson@la.gov](mailto:Jolie.williamson@la.gov) if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

Ms. Jolie V. Williamson, MS



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**Children's Cabinet, R.S. 46:2602**

The Cabinet members and the agencies they represent are listed below:

- Jolie Williamson, Executive Director of the Children's Cabinet
- Rebecca Harris, Secretary of Department of Children and Family Services; Replaced David Matlock in August of 2025.
- Bruce Greenstein, Secretary of Louisiana Department of Health; Replaced Michael Harrington in July of 2025
- Kenneth 'Kenny' Loftin, Deputy Secretary for Youth Services of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections
- Susana Schowen, Executive Director of Louisiana Workforce Commissions
- Susan Bonnett Bourgeois, Secretary of the Department of Economic Development
- Dr. Cade Brumley, State Superintendent of Education
- Taylor Barras, Commissioner of Administration
- ReShonn Saul, Representative and Chair of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board
- Representative Annie Spell, House of Representatives; Replaced Sen. Brach Myers in June of 2025
- Senator Regina Barrow, Louisiana State Senate
- Judge Thomas Duplantier, Member of the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- Simone Champagne, State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education



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**Children's Cabinet, R.S. 46:2602**

In 2025, the Louisiana Children's Cabinet continued its work under the new administration of Governor Jeff Landry, marking a year of intentional rebuilding, strategic alignment, and renewed collaboration. This period represented both a transition and a foundational year for strengthening the Cabinet's structure, partnerships, and statutory compliance under the leadership of a newly appointed Executive Director.

Guided by the Governor's transition committee recommendations, the Children's Cabinet focused on several priority areas, including revitalizing the Cabinet's operations and engagement; reestablishing relationships with state agencies, courts, legislators, and community partners; and ensuring statutory obligations were met through consistent coordination with the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB). A critical legislative achievement during this period was the passage of **House Bill 137**, which authorized agency designees to attend meetings on behalf of appointed members. This change significantly improved attendance, ensured quorum, and strengthened cross-agency participation.

Throughout 2025, the Children's Cabinet convened regular meetings centered on priority issues impacting children and families across Louisiana. Meeting topics included Early Childhood Support Services (ECSS); CCAB budget recommendations; the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF) grantee application and approval process; the LCTF Five-Year State Plan; Medicaid services in schools; ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households; human





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trafficking prevention efforts; statewide prevention and resource coordination through Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana and VIA LINK; and community-based initiatives such as GEAUX Far Louisiana.

The Children's Cabinet also supported and advanced several key initiatives in 2025. These included the approval and oversight of Louisiana Children's Trust Fund prevention grants; continued partnership with LCTF in hosting and supporting the statewide Child Abuse Prevention Conference; sustained collaboration with Louisiana Youth of Excellence (LYFE) to strengthen character development and prevention programming; and implementation of the LCTF Five-Year State Plan. Additional efforts included support for the Children's Caucus, expanded interagency coordination on prevention strategies.

In addition, the Children's Cabinet increased statewide visibility and public engagement through a series of formally recognized proclamations promoting awareness, collaboration, and prevention messaging across Louisiana:

- "Power of Presence" to Combat Truancy – June 12th: Highlighted the importance of student attendance, parental involvement, and school connectedness as critical drivers of academic success and dropout prevention.
- Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana – April: Elevated statewide awareness about child abuse prevention and connected citizens to available support resources and reporting pathways.



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- Louisiana Youth Outdoor Month – April: Encouraged outdoor recreation and physical activity among Louisiana youth to improve health, well-being, and family connection.
- Cross-Agency Collaboration – May: Promoted multi-agency cooperation, communication, and information-sharing to improve outcomes for Louisiana children and families.
- Future Business Leaders of America – February: Supported student leadership development, workforce preparedness, and career readiness initiatives in partnership with FBLA chapters statewide.
- Pediatric Cancer Awareness Day – September 13th (planned presentation on September 9): Recognized children facing pediatric cancer and acknowledged the need for family support, research, and treatment access.
- Child Health Day – October 6, 2025: Called on Louisianans to wear blue and green to raise awareness for child physical, mental, and emotional health statewide.

These proclamations strengthened Louisiana's public messaging efforts, supported community partnership building, and amplified the Children's Cabinet's mission to improve outcomes for children and families.



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**Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB), R.S. 46:2605**

The board members and the agencies they represent are listed below:

- Teresa Falgoust- Agenda for Children
- Ursula Anderson- Louisiana Children's Trust Fund
- Sherrard Crespo- Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana
- Caroline Nailor-Oglesby, MAEd- Louisiana Early Steps
- Judge Ree J. Casey Jones- Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; Replaced by Judge Amanda Calegero in July of 2025
- Kahree Wahid- Director of the State Head Start Collaboration Project
- Vi Eve Martin Kohrs- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Advisory Board; Replaced by Marcella Elliot December 2025
- Gina Eubanks- Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service
- Constance A. Bellone- Parent Representative
- Chenier Reynolds Montz- Parent Representative
- Dr. Rebecca Hook- DCFS Assistant Secretary of Child Welfare; Replaced by Bret Haneman in August of 2025
- Tangela Womack- Office of Women's Health and Community Health
- Julie Foster Hagan- Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities of the Louisiana Department of Health
- Tonya Joiner- Louisiana Department of Health Office of Public Health





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- Karen Stubbs- Office of Behavioral Health of Louisiana Department of Health
- Kimberly L. Sullivan- Bureau of Health Services Financing of the Louisiana Department of Health
- Mary E. Libbie Sonnier, PhD- Louisiana Policy Institute for Children
- Courtney Myers- Office of Juvenile Justice
- Shanna Beber- Department of Education Academic Programs
- Amy Hook Poirier- Department of Education; Replaced by Karen Powell in May of 2025
- Ernise Singleton- Louisiana Department of Education Support Progress
- Sonia Mallett- Division of Administration
- Joseph Patout- Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee Chair
- ReShonn Saul- Louisiana Families in Need of Services Association
- Amanda Moody- Louisiana Court Appointed Special Advocate Association
- Stephanie Sterling- Louisiana Catholic Conference
- Dr. Amber Blair- Louisiana Community and Technical College Systems
- Dr. Amy Dickson- LSU Health Sciences
- Angela Wiggins-Harris- National Association of Social Workers
- Kathleen Ritchie- State Child Ombudsman
- Dr. Katie Queen- Louisiana Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
- Cody Roi- Louisiana Council of Child and Adolescent Psychology
- Jennifer Firmin- Louisiana Assembly of School Based Public Health



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- Annette Fruge'- Families Helping Families of Acadiana; Replaced by Brenda Bares in July of 2025
- Krystle Mitchell- Louisiana Alliance Children's Advocacy Centers; VACANT as of September 2025
- Sarah Hinshaw- Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health at Tulane University
- Susan East Nelson- Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families
- Kathy Coleman: Additional Member
- Storm Ehlers: Additional Member
- Michelle Gros: Additional Member
- Dr. Christian Vige': Additional Member



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**Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB), R.S. 46:2605**

Throughout 2025, the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB) agendas reflected a broad, multidisciplinary focus on systems-level challenges, prevention, and coordinated service delivery for children and families. Meetings featured substantive briefings, trainings, and strategic discussions designed to inform policy recommendations, strengthen cross-agency alignment, and elevate community-based solutions.

CCAB members received legal and policy updates relevant to child-serving systems, including briefings from the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families and presentations on Open Meetings Law compliance, reinforcing the Board's commitment to statutory alignment and transparent governance.

Agendas consistently elevated behavioral health and whole-child approaches, including presentations on Whole Health Louisiana, behavioral health services for children in grades K–12, and community-based mental health supports. These discussions emphasized access, prevention, and coordination across education, health, and family-serving systems.

The CCAB also addressed education and literacy initiatives, including updates from the Louisiana Department of Education on statewide literacy efforts and school-based supports, as well as discussions related to chronic absenteeism and truancy through ongoing Solutions Summit on Truancy planning and steering committee updates.





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Throughout the year, agendas highlighted the needs of vulnerable youth and families, with presentations from organizations serving children impacted by abuse, neglect, trauma, and family instability. These included briefings from the Children's Bureau of New Orleans, Family Youth Counseling Agency, Hope for Opelousas, Health for Our Kids, Positive Movement, TentMakers of Louisiana, Healing House, and the Salvation Army, underscoring the importance of community-based prevention, intervention, and recovery services.

CCAB members also engaged in public health and prevention-focused discussions, including presentations from Whole Health Louisiana, Child Death Review Panel findings, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) awareness, emphasizing early identification, education, and system-level responses to prevent harm and improve long-term outcomes for children.

In alignment with its statutory role, the CCAB devoted significant agenda time to strategic planning and budget recommendations, including structured subcommittee discussions spanning Vulnerable Youth, Behavioral Health Services, Family Stability, Early Childhood Experiences, Early Learning and Literacy, and Partners in Protecting Children. These discussions informed the development of budget priorities and policy recommendations submitted to the Children's Cabinet and the Governor's Office.

Overall, these agenda items demonstrate the CCAB's role as an active, cross-sector advisory body addressing complex issues affecting children and families through legal oversight, prevention strategies, behavioral health, education, public health, community-based services, and



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strategic funding alignment. The breadth of discussion throughout 2025 reflects a deliberate shift toward integrated, collaborative approaches to improving outcomes for Louisiana's children and youth.



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**Children's Cabinet Advisory Board Sub-Committee Group Budget Priority**

**Recommendations Fiscal Year 2026**

**Group Name:** Vulnerable Youth Subcommittee

**Group Chairs Names and Email Addresses:** Michelle Gros,

specialprojects@pelicancenter.org

**Overview:** The Vulnerable Youth Subcommittee is committed to improving outcomes for Louisiana youth who face significant challenges such as abuse, neglect, trafficking, violence, criminal justice involvement, substance use, health issues, homelessness, poverty, and family instability. With a focus on youth connected to the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and those aging out of foster care, the Subcommittee works to develop strategic, actionable recommendations that strengthen statewide and community-based supports. Our goal is to reduce vulnerability to criminal activity and adverse childhood experiences, build resilience, and help ensure better long-term outcomes.

**Budget Priorities:**

1. **Prioritize funding for one-stop shops for children and families to receive wrap-around services with a focus on diverting children and families from juvenile, criminal, and child welfare system involvement.**





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Louisiana continues to face urgent challenges in supporting its children and families.

- In 2023, Louisiana's overall poverty rate was approximately 18.9 percent, one of the highest in the nation.
- In 2022, 24.4 percent of Louisiana children lived in poverty, the third-highest rate nationally.
- Financial hardship extends beyond poverty: in 2023, 19 percent of households earned below the federal poverty line, and another 30 percent were ALICE households—families earning above poverty but still unable to meet basic needs. Together, half of all Louisiana households are financially strained.
- According to the 2025 Kids Count Data Book, Louisiana ranks 49th out of 50 states in overall child well-being, reflecting persistent struggles across health, education, economic stability, and community support.
- Juvenile justice data underscores the urgency: at the end of 2024, there were approximately 480 youth in secure juvenile custody, an 8 percent increase from the previous year and 16 percent higher than in 2022. On a typical day, around 883 youth are in state custody, including secure, non-secure, and FINS placements. When including community-based supervision, the total rises to more than 3,100 youth statewide.
- Louisiana's juvenile incarceration rate is 84 per 100,000 youth, more than double the national average of 39 per 100,000.



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- At the same time, school arrests, expulsions, truancy, and foster care entries are increasing, further underscoring the need for early, community-based intervention.

Taken together, these figures show that Louisiana's children and families face some of the steepest barriers in the nation. More than ever, there is a need for accessible, wrap-around supports and one-stop diversion centers that interrupt cycles of harm—including school failure, family instability, justice involvement, and child welfare entry—by addressing root causes before crises escalate.

Several parishes have already pioneered these one-stop shop models and demonstrated what is possible. Examples include the MARC (Multi-Agency Resource Center) in Calcasieu Parish, the Harbor in Caddo Parish, the Anchor (New Orleans Youth Assessment Center) in Orleans Parish, the Juvenile Assessment Center in Jefferson Parish, the Plaquemines C.A.R.E. Center, and the St. Charles CARE Center. Each is built on collaboration among schools, courts, local government, law enforcement, district attorneys, and nonprofit providers. These centers offer families a single location to access multiple services—diverting children from detention, court involvement, and foster care by connecting them to supports that help them thrive.



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**Examples:**

**MARC - Calcasieu Parish**

The MARC operates under the supervision of the Calcasieu Parish Policy Jury, and its main goal is to divert youth aged 6-18 from the juvenile justice system into suitable programs and services, while also significantly reducing wait times for access to community services from weeks to hours. For example, children who are truant, are having problems at school or home, or have been arrested for low-level offenses can be referred to these programs for support. Instead of, for example, putting kids into detention, divert them from involvement with the juvenile and child welfare system by supporting them and helping them identify and address root issues.

It is a collaboration of various entities, including the 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court's Family and Juvenile Court Division, the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office, the Calcasieu School Board, the Calcasieu District Attorney's Office, the Calcasieu Public Defenders Office, and other key community partners.

The MARC provides a 24-hour helpline for youth, families, law enforcement, and other referral sources and non-traditional in-person service hours to ensure convenience for families (It is open Monday through Saturday from 8:00am-12:00am.). Schools can contact the MARC to provide immediate assistance to students, parents can contact the MARC for support, community providers can contact the MARC to assist in creating





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safety and support plans with families they serve, and child protection services can use the MARC facility as a neutral site for families. It supports families with basic needs, behavioral and mental health services, crisis interventions, substance use, life skills, and mentoring. Services at the MARC include a single-entry point to reduce service duplication, provide immediate assistance to youth and families without system involvement, provide evidence-based programming to address needs, and is a data-driven center that can be modified to address community needs. It assists law enforcement by providing an alternative to arresting and charging youth, giving the youth and their parents an opportunity to be part of a diversion program that addresses the identified issues, provides services to the family, and prevents formal charges.

Since opening its doors in 2011, the MARC has served over 20,000 youth. Of those, 44% received immediate support within hours, 87% were diverted from formal court processing, and 36% avoided any justice system involvement at all.

The MARC has also documented the following results since 2014:

- Petitions decreased by 45%.
- Status referrals decreased by 67%.
- Detention placements decreased by 58%.



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- 87% of all cases referred to the MARC were diverted from formal processing (15,738 youth diverted from court involvement).
- Case processing time decreased from 17 days to 3.9 days.
- Chances of re-offense decreased from 26% to 12%.
- Status referrals decreased fivefold.

The MARC operates with an annual budget of approximately \$906,827, the majority of which is employee costs. Importantly, communities can launch assessment centers on a smaller scale by reallocating existing staff from other departments, as Calcasieu did successfully.

The MARC participates in the Assessment Center Outcome Reporting Network (ACORN), a national framework that standardizes data collection and outcome reporting. Calcasieu's data team is even assisting other states in developing streamlined data applications. This national participation underscores that MARC is a data-driven, flexible, and adaptable model, grounded in best practices but tailored to local community needs.

### **Harbor - Volunteers of Youth Justice – Caddo Parish**

The Harbor is a one-stop resource center in Caddo Parish, administered by Volunteers for Youth Justice (VYJ). It is designed to meet the needs of children and families by housing multiple agencies in one location. Families have access to mental health services, parenting support, child advocacy, domestic violence counseling, conflict resolution programs, and youth workforce



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development — all under one roof. With more than 55,000 square feet of space, the Harbor brings together community partners to deliver wrap-around supports that prevent deeper system involvement for children and families.

In partnership with the Caddo Parish District Attorney's Office, the Harbor houses a full range of juvenile diversion programs, designed to address root causes of behavior while keeping youth out of detention:

- Stamp Out Shoplifting (SOS): A workshop for youth with theft offenses requiring community service and written apologies, with parental involvement.
- Power of Choice (POC): A six-session program covering decision-making, peer pressure, conflict resolution, sexual responsibility, and substance use, with concurrent parent sessions.
- Teen Court: Non-violent, first-time juvenile offenders are judged by a jury of peers and make restitution for offenses.
- Conflict Resolution: Prevents school fights and violent behavior by offering alternatives for first-time fight referrals or verbal altercations, reducing suspensions and avoiding court appearances.
- GEMS & GENTS Mentoring/Leadership Academy: Long-term mentoring for middle and high school students, pairing them with adult mentors and equipping them with leadership, self-esteem, and social skills.





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The Harbor is housed in a building owned by the Caddo Parish School System, which leases the facility to VYJ for a very minimal annual cost. The School System also covers building maintenance, and 24/7 security is provided, ensuring a safe environment. VYJ manages the Harbor, charging rent to service providers to sustain operations. Many providers utilize Medicaid reimbursement for services, making the model both cost-effective and sustainable.

By centralizing services and offering meaningful diversion alternatives, the Harbor prevents unnecessary foster care placements, reduces juvenile detention, and ensures families receive the right support at the right time.

#### **The Anchor – New Orleans Youth Assessment Center (NOYAC) – Orleans Parish**

The Anchor – New Orleans Youth Assessment Center (NOYAC) is a newly launched pilot in New Orleans serving youth ages 10–17 who are exhibiting behaviors that place them at risk of juvenile justice involvement. Referrals may come from schools, law enforcement, families, or community members. Rather than criminalizing these behaviors, NOYAC identifies root causes, addresses needs, and coordinates personalized services through trauma-informed assessments and case management.

The Anchor is operated by the Family Center of Hope, which has provided community-based services since 1988. In addition to its role as a referral and coordination hub, NOYAC connects



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youth and families directly to the following in-house programs already offered by the Family Center of Hope:

- Passages Mentoring Program: A culturally relevant rites-of-passage model that promotes self-awareness, responsibility, decision-making, and respect.
- Parenting Matters: Parent education groups that strengthen parenting skills, promote nurturing behavior, and improve parent-child relationships.
- Evening Reporting Center (ERC): A 45-day alternative to detention program offering structured, short-term intensive services that keep youth in the community while addressing poor decision-making and preparing them for court return.

Beyond these programs, NOYAC uses its assessment and navigation team to connect youth to a broad network of behavioral health services, grassroots programs, mentoring, education supports, housing services, and culturally responsive community partners.

NOYAC operates under the National Assessment Center (NAC) Framework, which emphasizes prevention, deterrence, and diversion. This includes:

- Preventing escalation by addressing contributing factors and disrupting the school-to-justice involvement,
- Deterring delinquency by offering positive alternatives, cultural connections, and accountability.



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- Diverting youth away from detention and into community-based services that reduce recidivism.

Anticipated outcomes include fewer detention admissions, shorter lengths of stay, faster connections to behavioral health services (within 14 days), improved school re-enrollment, and reduced re-arrest rates. Evidence-based approaches like Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) are expected to generate both outcome improvements and substantial cost savings.

The projected annual operating cost for NOYAC is \$1.8 million. Funding is currently provided through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 and is set to expire in December 2026. Sustainability planning is underway to secure long-term investment, recognizing that this is not just an operational expense but a commitment to reducing youth justice involvement and building safer, stronger communities in New Orleans.

The Anchor provides New Orleans families with a single point of entry into services, linking youth to both proven community-based programs and targeted in-house supports. Built on decades of trusted experience by the Family Center of Hope, NOYAC represents a new way of addressing at-risk behaviors before they escalate, giving young people and their families the support, they need to thrive.





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**Juvenile Assessment Center – Jefferson Parish**

The Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) in Jefferson Parish, established in 2001, was the first of its kind in Louisiana. It was created through a collaboration between the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office and the Department of Juvenile Services to provide a front-end, assessment-driven entry point for youth encountering the juvenile justice system. The JAC was designed to answer a critical question: what if, instead of automatically detaining or sending youth straight to court, we first understood their needs and connected them to help?

At JAC, every youth who comes through is screened using validated tools to identify trauma, mental health needs, and risk factors. Staff conduct detention screenings to determine whether secure placement is necessary or if alternatives are available. Suicide risk assessments and crisis response are provided on-site. From there, case plans are developed, and JAC staff maintain short-term supervision until families are securely connected to other agencies or programs.

What makes JAC unique is its role as a coordinator and connector. Rather than trying to house every service under one roof, the JAC makes referrals to and actively collaborates with parish and state partners, including Families in Need of Services (FINS), the District Attorney's Office Juvenile Diversion Program, the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS), and the Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority



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(JPHSA). By doing so, it ensures youth and families are linked to the right services quickly, without waiting for months of court processing.

Before JAC existed, many Jefferson Parish youth were automatically placed in detention or left to wait until a court hearing to relate to services. Today, JAC functions as the front door of the system, making sure that lower-risk youth are identified early, assessed holistically, and directed toward supports rather than punishment.

For example, consider a 15-year-old brought in after a school fight. In the past, this youth would have likely been booked into detention and waited weeks to see a judge. At JAC, the youth is screened immediately, revealing untreated trauma and high stress at home. Instead of being locked up, the youth is referred to counseling through the Human Services Authority, while the family relates to parenting support through FINS. The fight is addressed, but without saddling the child with a record or exposing them to detention.

The difference is profound: families get faster help, law enforcement spends less time cycling youth through booking and detention, and community partners are better able to engage youth before their problems deepen. The Jefferson JAC model shows how assessment, early intervention, and coordinated referrals can reshape the trajectory of young people's lives — reducing unnecessary detention and creating a smarter, more humane response to youth in crisis.



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**St. Charles CARE Center – St. Charles Parish**

The St. Charles CARE Center operates as the parish's Family Assessment Center, serving as the primary diversion and early intervention hub for youth and families. Its mission is to prevent young people from becoming further involved with the justice system by identifying root challenges, providing comprehensive assessments, and connecting families with the right services. In partnership with the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office, the 29th Judicial District Court, and St. Charles Parish Public Schools, the CARE Center ensures families have a single-entry point for assessment, referral, and care navigation.

The CARE Center conducts 3–4 comprehensive assessment meetings with families, develops intervention plans, and refers families directly to services, with follow-up to ensure referrals "stick." Ongoing support includes coordination with schools, courts, and service providers. Key diversion pathways include:

- Truancy Assessment and Service Center (TASC) referrals for students with chronic absenteeism.
- Alternatives to Detention (ATD) in partnership with the 29th Judicial District Court and the Office of Juvenile Justice.





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- Community-based prevention referrals and self-referrals, connecting families to over 30 partner agencies offering mental health treatment, mentoring, legal aid, and basic needs support.

Outcomes:

- Over 90% of families complete assessments, and most follow through with recommended services.
- 84% of families accept referrals, and of those, 94% successfully participate or complete services.
- Repeat referrals are rare — only 0–10% of families return within 12 months, with the most recent quarter showing 0%.
- Roughly half of all referrals come from schools, showing the CARE Center's impact in diverting youth early in the attendance/truancy pipeline.

Nine-year-old Michelle came to the CARE Center after her school raised concerns about frequent absences tied to serious health and behavioral challenges. Through the Center's assessment, she and her mother were connected to Functional Family Therapy and psychiatric care. As a result, Michelle's truancy dropped dramatically, her behavior stabilized, and her mother reported feeling supported and more confident. Their case was successfully closed, with the family on a brighter path.



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The St. Charles CARE Center shows how a structured family assessment and referral process can divert youth at the earliest stages — from truancy to detention risks — and keep families engaged. Its high completion and follow-through rates, combined with consistently low re-referral rates, demonstrate a proven model of long-term diversion and prevention.

#### **Plaquemines Community C.A.R.E. Center – Plaquemines Parish**

The Plaquemines Community C.A.R.E. (Collaboration, Advocacy, Resources, and Education) Center was founded in 2005, shortly after Hurricane Katrina, as a nonprofit public-private partnership led by prosecutors, judges, deputies, educators, and healthcare professionals. Its mission is to provide early intervention and coordinated services that divert youth from deeper system involvement and strengthen families through a single, accessible hub.

The CARE Center brings together justice, education, and healthcare partners to provide behavioral health supports, family advocacy, victim services, and care navigation. Schools and prosecutors work directly with the center to identify at-risk youth, intervene early, and connect them to resources that address root causes rather than relying solely on court or detention.

For nearly twenty years, the CARE Center has demonstrated the impact of aligning courts, schools, and healthcare in one coordinated response. By focusing on prevention and diversion, the center has helped Plaquemines Parish keep youth out of detention, address family needs more quickly, and create a more unified community safety net.



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**Proposed Budget Plan**

To ensure every parish in Louisiana has a one-stop diversion hub that provides early intervention, wrap-around services, and coordinated care — preventing youth from entering or deepening involvement in the juvenile justice, child welfare, and criminal justice systems— Louisiana can launch a statewide network of Family Assessment & Diversion Centers with a conservative, flat investment of \$700,000 per parish annually.

**This funding supports:**

- Core staff (director, navigators/case managers, data/admin support).
- A central entry point for assessments, service referrals, and case management.
- Formal diversion pathways addressing:
  - Truancy and school absenteeism
  - Alternatives to detention
  - Recidivism reduction through evidence-based programs
  - Foster care prevention

**Statewide investment:** \$44.8M annually (64 parishes × \$700,000).





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**Estimated Annual Savings (Louisiana Averages)**

- **Detention diversion:** Preventing 75 youth per parish from 15 days of detention saves \$14.4M–\$27.3M statewide.
- **Foster care prevention:** Preventing 15 foster care placements per parish saves = \$34M statewide.

**Broader Long-Term Impact**

- **Fewer youth entering adult prison:** Avoiding 50 youth annually saves \$0.5M–\$2M in direct incarceration costs, with far greater long-term savings.
- **Reduced crime:** Preventing 100 serious juvenile offenses saves = \$5M annually in policing, courts, victimization, and corrections costs.
- **Stronger workforce:** Each high school graduate contributes = \$260,000 more in lifetime tax revenue and reduced public costs than a dropout—one of the most powerful returns on prevention.

**Total Estimated Annual Savings**

**\$48M–\$61M statewide (detention + foster care)**

**+ Additional long-term savings from:**

- Reduced recidivism through community programs
- Cost-avoidance from education-based alternatives
- Fewer youth incarcerated as adults



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- Higher graduation and workforce participation

### **Net Impact**

- **Investment:** \$44.8M annually (= \$700,000 per parish)
- **Savings:** At least \$48M–\$61M annually, plus long-term reductions in crime, incarceration, and public costs
- **Bottom Line:** Even at conservative estimates, one-stop diversion centers nearly pay for themselves. At scale, they generate substantial savings, strengthen families, improve public safety, and build Louisiana's future workforce.

### **Recommendation**

These one-stop centers are more than service hubs — they are prevention engines that change trajectories for children and families. By bringing schools, courts, law enforcement, and community providers together under one roof, they ensure that families can access mental health services, family support, advocacy, tutoring, therapy, mentoring, and other critical resources without waiting for a crisis or a court order.

The results are clear: fewer youth in detention, fewer repeat offenses, stronger school engagement, and families stabilized before entering the child welfare system. Louisiana already has successful models operating in several parishes. Now is the time to scale this proven approach statewide.



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It is recommended that **dedicated funding be established to support every parish in developing a one-stop diversion and assessment center.** This investment will reduce detention and foster care entries, lower recidivism, improve educational outcomes, and ultimately save the state money in both the short and long term. Louisiana has the blueprint. The opportunity now is to make it available to every child and family, in every parish.

The Governor's Children's Cabinet has the opportunity to lead this effort and make Louisiana a national model for child and family diversion. *Further information, as requested, can be collected and provided.*

**2. Ensure Dedicated, Recurring Funding for Local Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPBs)**

The Vulnerable Youth Subcommittee recognizes the important role of Louisiana's Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPBs), established under La. R.S. 46:1941, which are charged with assessing local needs, developing strategic community plans, and coordinating services for children and youth. CYPBs were designed by law to bring together required community partners in each jurisdiction of the state—including schools, law enforcement, courts, local government, and nonprofit providers—to strengthen prevention and intervention strategies at the parish level.





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Despite this statutory mandate, CYPBs continue to face major challenges that limit their effectiveness: (1) lack of sustained local funding, (2) limited administrative capacity to maintain operations and reporting, and (3) inconsistent engagement from required community partners. These barriers undermine the purpose of CYPBs and weaken Louisiana's ability to provide coordinated supports that prevent youth from entering foster care or the juvenile justice system. Strengthening CYPBs is critical because, through their coordination of required community partners, they can function as the first line of defense for families in crisis—to help ensure early intervention before problems escalate to child protection or juvenile court. By aligning services and supports at the community level, CYPBs can increase the possibility of keeping children safely with their families, which is far less costly and far more effective than foster care placements or detention.

The CYPBs also have tremendous potential because each jurisdiction faces different needs and has different available services and supports. Local boards are uniquely positioned to coordinate collaboration that is responsive to those differences, ensuring that families are served more effectively and efficiently while also identifying critical gaps in resources. The Vulnerable Youth Subcommittee fully supports and affirms the Family Stability Subcommittee's recommendations to prioritize CYPB funding and strategies that address these gaps. Sustained investment in CYPBs through a **dedicated, recurring funding stream** will ensure they can fulfill their statutory mandate, improve coordination among partners, and deliver the infrastructure needed to



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reduce system entries and improve outcomes for children statewide. *Further information, as requested, can be collected and provided.*

**3. Maximize Medicaid Funding for School Districts in Louisiana**

See the Behavioral Health Services for Children K-12 Subcommittees budget priority recommendation re: Maximizing Medicaid Funding for School Districts in Louisiana as we agree this budget item should be prioritized. The proposed uniform system for collecting and sharing medical records would also benefit youth involved in the child welfare and/or juvenile system who are more at risk of school transfers. *Further information, as requested, can be collected and provided.*

**4. Prioritize Ongoing Funding Statewide for Mobile Crisis Response and Community Brief Crisis Support for Children on Medicaid**

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) has expanded two services from the Louisiana Crisis Response System (LA-CRS) to serve children. Mobile Crisis Response and Community Brief Crisis Support began service to Louisiana children on Medicaid in 2024, and implementation continued to expand the reach of these services across more regions of the State throughout SFY25 and has continued to expand at the start of SFY26.

Mobile Crisis Response provides a 24/7 service as an initial intervention to children on Medicaid in a self-identified crisis, in which a crisis response team deploys to where the child is located in



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his or her community. Community Brief Crisis Support is a face-to-face, ongoing crisis intervention strategy designed to provide stabilization and support in the child's community subsequent to an initial intervention. Essentially, children on Medicaid who are experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder crisis will have access to a continuum of services until the crisis is resolved and/or the child returns to existing services or is linked to other behavioral health supports as needed. This intervention aims to divert children from institutional levels of care yet respects bed-based crisis services without relying on them as a foundation. With an estimated 56.8% (2023 LA Health Insurance Survey) of Louisiana children on Medicaid, it is recommended that funding for the continued implementation of these services in SFY26 be prioritized. *Further information, as requested, can be collected and provided.*





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**Group Name:** Behavioral Health Services for Children K-12

**Group Chairs Names and Email Addresses:** Connie Bellone, Chair

**Statement of Need and Benefit: Maximizing Medicaid Funding for School Districts in Louisiana**

Student health needs, both physical and behavioral health, continue to be a leading cause of chronic absenteeism and academic failure in public schools today. Research shows that increasing access to school health services promotes regular attendance, improves classroom behavior, and improves academic achievement. This leads to improved experiences for teachers as well and helps to mitigate student's risk for adverse outcomes in health, education, and lifetime well-being. This is especially important given the alarming rise in mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression among youth.

Current data systems in Louisiana's Departments of Education, Health, and Children and Family Services are not integrated with each other, which makes communication and required coordination of care impossible. School staff waste considerable time and resources chasing down records or manually reconciling conflicting data. Educators, administrators, healthcare providers, and social services make decisions based on partial or outdated information, which can harm students and impact outcomes. Important health and academic components such as parental consent, social histories, annual physical, health screenings, jurisdiction and school



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changes, placement changes, foster care assignments, etc. are not communicated to those who participate in the care and education of Louisiana's children because of system failures.

When disjointed systems are used, the risk of losing student records is significantly higher due to data fragmentation, manual errors, and inconsistent security practices. When student information exists in separate, non-integrated databases - such as one for grades, one for health records, and one for attendance - staff must manually re-enter data. Each manual transfer increases the risk of human error, leading to typos, incomplete records, or the loss of entire data sets during the transfer process. "Data silos" where information is isolated results in data loss creating unreliable and inconsistent information. These inaccurate or missing records cause serious issues for students including problems with class placements, transcript verification for higher education or employment, duplicate or missed healthcare encounters, and loss of the ability to track learning progress.

A fragmented technology infrastructure also makes it difficult to apply uniform security measures resulting in increased vulnerability to cyberattacks and data breaches. In addition, a lack of consistent, verifiable data makes it difficult to demonstrate compliance with regulations like HIPAA and FERPA, which can lead to legal penalties.



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As schools face budget challenges for education and health services, Louisiana has an opportunity to recoup additional and sustainable federal funding to stabilize its investment in students by optimizing School Based Medicaid reimbursement. Louisiana has already taken the first critical step in expanding the program to cover all Medicaid students and cover additional health services. This has resulted in the state realizing over \$662 million in reimbursement from 2015 through 2024.

As we have made improvements to this program, reimbursement has continued to increase annually. In federal FY 2023, Louisiana schools drew down \$90 million in federal funds while other southern states have recovered much more. For example, Florida received \$95 million, and Texas recovered \$740 million, 10 times more than Louisiana on a per student basis for the same time period. In FY 2024, Louisiana schools' reimbursement dipped to \$82 million.

The Children's Cabinet Advisory Board has recognized the importance of this program and has made formal recommendations for several years and the state has taken steps to increase its use. Louisiana was the first state to expand reimbursement for nursing services and the third state to expand the program to include all Medicaid eligible students ages 3-21. Several steps remain to be taken.





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**2025 Recommendations**

**The Children's Cabinet Advisory Board Subcommittee recommends the following:**

- **Submission of State Plan Amendment to EPSDT Medicaid State Plan that would allow participation by children 0-3 years old, allowing health and behavioral issues to be addressed earlier.**
- **Include in submission of State Plan Amendment the elimination of processes that result in duplication of effort and additional paperwork currently impeding local school district participation.**
- **Funding implementation of a standardized statewide electronic health record (EHR) system for all students that meets Louisiana privacy laws and ensures the required documentation is captured properly. This will also guarantee that a student's health record follows them throughout their educational journey. By phasing in a statewide unified electronic documentation system in schools, the reimbursement will be positively impacted in all schools in the state at the same time. To realize additional increases in reimbursement, the EHR can be scaled across the state upon completion of a pilot. This system will also support increasing regulatory compliance with Medicaid documentation requirements.**
- **Expand access and use of above standardized statewide electronic health record to (EHR) to other state agencies involved in the care of children including DCSF to facilitate cross**



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**agency collaboration and include foster children and other wards of the state thereby standardizing electronic health records for all youth in Louisiana**

- Include electronic capture of parental consent to participate in Medicaid in Schools in electronic health record.**
- Include annual student health physicals in the electronic health record.**
- Adjusting annual cost reporting to include reimbursement for electronic health record expense as a direct expenditure to allow draw down of federal reimbursement for this expense.**
- Revise Time Study Implementation Plan to include monthly or quarterly payments in place of billing for services as allowed in CMS 2023 Medicaid in Schools Guidance.**
- Include mechanism for school districts to receive reimbursement in addition to incremental billing amounts in first year of participation in Medicaid in Schools Program as allowed.**
- Standardization of behavioral health screening instruments used by state agencies (LDE, DCSF, etc.) to include standardized, valid, evidenced based instruments approved by American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures website**

Footnotes:

1 <https://www.tpr.org/education/2024-01-11/texas-school-districts-lose-300-million-in-federal-special-education-funding>

2 Texas Educational Agency 2022-2023 Enrollment Public Schools report



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3 Louisiana Believes, oct-2022-multi-stats-(total-by-site-and-school-system).xlsx (live.com).

4 performance-profiles-(all-leas)-2021-2022.pdf (louisianabelieves.com)

5 Florida Department of Education





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**Group Name:** Family Stability Subcommittee 2025 Recommendations

**Group Chairs Names and Email Addresses:** Dr. Christian Vigé', Chair

**Report prepared by Family Stability Subcommittee Chair, Dr. Christian Vigé**

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### **Overview**

In 2025, the Family Stability Subcommittee continues its commitment to strengthening Louisiana's families and supporting children through collaborative, forward-focused initiatives. Building on the foundation set in 2024, the Subcommittee has updated its training resources, expanded its partnerships, and developed new strategies for addressing family instability across the state.

The Subcommittee recognizes that progress requires both persistence and adaptability. While significant strides were made last year, new challenges have emerged that require innovative solutions. The committee has therefore prioritized capacity building, accountability, and sustainability as the guiding themes for 2025.

### **Updated Tools and Resources**

A central focus for 2025 is ensuring that training and awareness remain current and accessible. To this end, the Subcommittee has revised its training PowerPoint presentation. The updated resource now includes:

- Enhanced content reflecting legislative updates, and statewide data.



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- Practical guidance for judicial partners, community agencies, schools, and governing authorities on how to support children and families.
- Case examples and scenarios that encourage discussion, problem-solving, and application of principles in real-world settings.

This updated training was deployed across communities and local governing authorities at the beginning of early 2025, with a commitment to provide updated resources and support through the Cabinet office, to ensure consistency and long-term knowledge retention.

### **Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPBs)**

The Subcommittee has placed strong emphasis on the development and re-activation of Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPBs). These boards serve as essential mechanisms for community-based problem-solving and local accountability. In 2025, the Subcommittee has taken deliberate steps to map the status of CYPBs across Louisiana's judicial districts/local governing authorities to set clear priorities for expanding their reach.

As of July 28, 2025, the status of CYPBs is as follows:

- **ACTIVE:** 9 districts
- **FORMING / WILL BE ACTIVE:** 2 districts
- **Other/Unknown or Not Reported:** 33 districts

This analysis highlights both progress and gaps. While several districts have successfully activated boards and established functional operations—often housed under local police juries, district attorney offices, or mayor's offices—many parishes remain without active or reported



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boards. The Subcommittee will continue to work with judicial leaders, local governments, and state partners to address these gaps in 2025.

#### **2025 Recommendations**

##### **1. Expansion of CYPB Implementation**

The Subcommittee strongly recommends accelerating the formation and activation of CYPBs statewide. This work will include:

- Targeted outreach and technical assistance to judicial districts that are currently inactive or in the early stages of formation.
- Resource development for hosting agencies such as police juries, mayor's offices, and district attorney offices to reduce barriers to board activation.
- Clear progress reporting mechanisms requiring CYPBs to provide structured updates on membership, activities, and outcomes to ensure accountability and transparency through annual reporting to the Cabinet office.

By expanding the number of fully active CYPBs, the state will strengthen local infrastructures that support families and children, while ensuring that every judicial district/local governing authority has a functional and responsive planning board.

##### **2. Strengthening Training and Awareness**

The updated training PowerPoint represents a major step forward, but training must be paired with consistent implementation. The Subcommittee recommends that:





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- Annual training sessions be required for all CYPB members, judicial leaders, and community stakeholders involved in family stability work.
- Refresher modules be offered mid-year to ensure continuity and to allow for rapid integration of new legislative or policy changes.
- Evaluation surveys be conducted after each training to assess effectiveness, improve content, and track long-term impact.
- Annual reporting be required for all CYPBs to the Cabinet office to ensure ongoing activity and meetings are occurring.

By making training and reporting an ongoing process of learning and renewal, the Subcommittee will help to embed best practices across Louisiana's family support systems.

### **3. Enhancing Cross-Agency Collaboration**

Family stability requires the full cooperation of multiple systems, including schools, community partners, courts, healthcare providers, and social service agencies. The Subcommittee recommends:

- Formalized data-sharing agreements between courts, schools, and local service providers to reduce duplication of efforts and improve coordinated care through CYPB meetings.
- Regional collaboration meetings that bring together multiple parishes to share resources, identify common challenges, and develop joint solutions for family stability and accessibility to resources.



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- Increased outreach to rural and underserved parishes, ensuring that geography does not limit access to resources and supports.

This recommendation reflects the Subcommittee's belief that no single agency or parish can achieve stability for families alone. Collaboration is essential, and 2025 will be a year of building stronger partnerships and shared responsibility.

#### **4. Legislative and Budget Positioning**

The success of CYPBs and other stability initiatives depends on continued legislative support.

For 2025, the Subcommittee will work to:

- Advocate for dedicated budget appropriations through the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) to provide stable funding for CYPB operations.
- Recommend legislative adjustments that remove barriers to CYPB activation and enhance accountability mechanisms.
- Explore funding streams and grant opportunities that could supplement state resources and expand program sustainability.

By positioning family stability as a priority in the state legislative agenda, Louisiana can ensure that initiatives launched in recent years continue to thrive.

#### **5. Proactive Monitoring and Evaluation**

Finally, the Subcommittee emphasizes the importance of ongoing evaluation to measure progress and refine strategies. For 2025, the Subcommittee recommends:



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- The creation of standardized evaluation tools to measure the impact of CYPBs and related initiatives on family stability, juvenile justice outcomes, and child well-being.
- Annual reporting from active CYPBs to the Children's Cabinet to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Development of benchmarks and performance indicators, with a comprehensive statewide report scheduled for release in 2026.

This focus on proactive monitoring will allow the Subcommittee to identify gaps, celebrate successes, and continuously adapt strategies to meet the evolving needs of Louisiana families.

#### **6. Technology Access for Families of Incarcerated Parents**

The Subcommittee recognizes that healthy family relationships are a stabilizing factor for both children and incarcerated parents. For many families, distance, transportation barriers, and financial constraints limit consistent contact. Research demonstrates that safe, structured, and affordable communication between incarcerated parents and their children can reduce trauma, support reentry, and promote long-term family stability.





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#### **Budget Request and Legislative Alignment**

- A dedicated line-item appropriation for the **Council on the Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP Council)** to fund technology initiatives that support family connectivity.
- Funds should be allocated to:
  - Install and maintain secure digital communication platforms (video calls, messaging systems, and monitored email kiosks) within correctional facilities.
  - Provide technology access points for children and caregivers (e.g., courthouse-based family rooms, community centers, and schools) to ensure communication is accessible, even for families without home internet.
  - Develop a statewide donation and redistribution program for refurbished devices and prepaid data access, reducing barriers for families in rural and low-income areas.
  - Pilot “Family Communication Rooms” at select courthouses and community centers, building on existing safe haven models to provide a dignified, supervised space for children to connect with incarcerated parents.

#### **Implementation and Oversight**

- All communications must comply with Department of Public Safety and Corrections security protocols and be contingent upon determinations that family contact is in the child's best interest.



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- The CIP Council, housed in the Governor's Office, will oversee planning, vendor contracting, and annual reporting on usage, outcomes, and impact on child well-being.
- Cross-agency collaboration with DCFS, OJJ, and the Louisiana Department of Education will ensure that children's educational and developmental needs are prioritized when scheduling and supporting communication.

#### **Projected Budget Impact (FY 2025–2026)**

- **\$2.5M initial appropriation** for equipment, installation, and first-year maintenance across priority facilities and pilot sites.
- **\$1.2M annually** thereafter for ongoing operations, including software licensing, staff support, and evaluation.

#### **Expected Outcomes**

- Increased frequency of safe and structured communication between children and incarcerated parents, reducing family isolation.
- Strengthened protective factors for children, including improved school attendance, emotional stability, and reduced behavioral disruptions.
- Long-term cost savings by reducing recidivism through improved family reintegration outcomes.

By integrating this recommendation into the Family Stability agenda, Louisiana will position itself as a leader in recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by children of



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incarcerated parents. Ensuring equitable access to communication is a crucial step in breaking cycles of trauma, supporting resilience, and giving children a stable foundation for the future.

**Conclusion**

The Family Stability Subcommittee continues its efforts and vision of 2025 with a strengthened plan of action. By expanding CYPBs, enhancing training, promoting collaboration, supporting communication for families of incarcerated parents, and maintaining robust monitoring, the Subcommittee is confident that significant progress can be made toward the goal of stable, thriving families across Louisiana.

This work is foundational to the well-being of children, the strength of communities, and the future of our state. The Subcommittee remains committed to walking alongside families, partners, and policymakers to make this vision a reality.





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**Group Name:** Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health/Early Experience Subcommittee

**Group Chairs Names and Email Addresses:** Dr. Sarah Hinshaw, Chair

*The legislature allocated, appropriated, and obligated funds from 2022-2026 to support the development and implementation of Early Childhood Supports & Services statewide. Building on this commitment, this subcommittee recommends the following:*

1. Office of Behavioral Health & Magellan should present to the Select Committee on Women & Children by December 31, 2025, to include:
  - a. Status of ECSS Statewide
  - b. Plan for spending the full amount of funding that has been allocated, appropriated, and obligated to ECSS and must be spent by December 31, 2026.
4. Office of Behavioral Health & Magellan should develop a plan for sustainability of ECSS by November 1, 2025. They should participate fully in Zero-To-Three's Financing Policy Project to access a community of learners, ZTT technical assistance, and exposure to neighboring states who are successfully developing early childhood mental health supports and services.
5. The administration should express support for the Medicaid rate increases as outlined in Act 306 of 2024 by ensuring that they are included in the Governor's recommendations for HB1.



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6. The administration should prioritize the allocation of the necessary state general funds for months January – June 2027 of State Fiscal Year 2026 – 2027 to allow the continuation of ECSS after the ARPA funds have been expended. This prioritization of funding is built on the data which indicates that such spending on IECMH will prevent the exponential cost in child welfare and juvenile justice. The necessary state general funds needed should be determined by the state spending plan and done so in collaboration with DCFS/Louisiana Workforce Commission, Medicaid, and any other available source of funding as identified in the report commissioned by members of the IECMH Subcommittee and authored by Dr. Geoff Nagle.

**\*This set of recommendations is a revision of recommendations initially submitted by the IECMH Subcommittee in July 2025. This document was drafted by Susan Nelson, JD, based on discussion in IECMH Subcommittee meetings on September 9, 2025 and September 22, 2025.**



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**Subcommittee Name:** Early Learning, Literacy, & K-12 Subcommittee

**Chairs Names and Email Addresses:** Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D., [lsonnier@policyinstitute.org](mailto:lsonnier@policyinstitute.org)

**Overview**

The subcommittee's work centers on strengthening Louisiana's educational continuum from birth through grade 12, with a focus on early learning, literacy, and K–12 alignment. Its priorities include expanding access to high-quality early care and education, ensuring smooth transitions from early learning settings to kindergarten, and promoting coordinated investments and accountability across agencies. The subcommittee also emphasizes early literacy by supporting evidence-based instruction from birth through grade three, aligning statewide literacy initiatives with early childhood and K–12 strategies, and monitoring literacy outcomes to close opportunity gaps. In addition, it works to strengthen alignment between early childhood and K–12 systems by examining policies that promote educational outcomes and continuous learning progressions.

**Budget Priorities:**

1. Invest an additional \$95 million of state funds in our state's early childhood programs for birth-to three-year-olds now and an additional \$95 million annually for the next 10 years, to gradually grow and sustain state investment in ECE each year. While cost-sharing and other innovative models will help many working families, more investment will ensure every family can





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get the quality ECE they need. This level of investment will ensure that Louisiana will increase the number of children served from 18% to 66.6%.

2. Invest \$30M in the Early Childhood Education Fund now and ensure that the state meets its matching fund obligation each year by codifying the annual match into law. Based on current projections, the dedicated revenue streams for the ECE Fund will not generate the \$30 million required to meet our state's commitments over the next fiscal year. The ECE Fund has proven its ability to attract local funding for early education, thereby helping to stabilize local workforces in Louisiana parishes. Codifying the Fund into law will increase trust and engagement in the Fund throughout the state.

3. Invest \$15 million to increase early childhood professional development grounded in the science of reading to strengthen literacy instruction and improve kindergarten readiness. By equipping pre-k educators with research-based knowledge on how children learn to read—such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—teachers are better prepared to lay a strong literacy foundation during the critical early years. In addition to formal training, the subcommittee supports job-embedded coaching models that provide ongoing, classroom-based guidance and feedback. This approach allows educators to apply evidence-based literacy practices in real time, reflect on their instruction, and continuously refine their skills. Together, these strategies ensure that Louisiana's youngest learners enter kindergarten with the language, cognitive, and pre-literacy skills necessary for long-term academic success.



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4. Invest \$10 - \$15 million to prioritize supporting students with dyslexia through specialized, evidence-based interventions designed to meet their unique learning needs. Recognizing that early identification and targeted instruction are essential, the subcommittee promotes the use of diagnostic assessments to identify students at risk and ensure timely support.

1. Effective interventions focus on multisensory structured language and literacy approaches that emphasize an explicit, sequential, meaning-based, and prescriptive application.
2. In addition, the subcommittee encourages professional development for educators and interventionists to build capacity in implementing these specialized methods with fidelity. By ensuring that students with dyslexia receive tailored, research-based instruction and ongoing progress monitoring, Louisiana schools can help every learner develop the literacy skills necessary for academic achievement and lifelong learning.



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**Subcommittee Name:** Partners in Protecting Children

**Chairs Names and Email Addresses:** Joseph Patout, Joseph.Patout@la.gov

The Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee was established under the Louisiana Children's Cabinet Advisory Board pursuant to **Ezekiel's Law (Act 40 of the 2023 Regular Session)** and further directed by **House Resolution 305 of the 2024 Regular Session** to study the needs of Louisiana's child welfare system and to develop recommendations that strengthen child protection and improve outcomes for children.

While the intent of this charge was strong and necessary, the Subcommittee's broad scope-encompassing child welfare, prevention, and multi-agency coordination-has presented challenges related to maintaining a focused agenda, sustaining engagement across multiple systems, and avoiding duplication of existing efforts. In response, a smaller working group convened to reassess the structure, scope, and alignment of the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee with current statewide priorities.

Through this review, it became evident that there is significant overlap in both **membership and mission** between the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee and the **Child Abuse Task Force**. Both bodies include representation from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), law enforcement, the judiciary, and child advocacy organizations, and both are charged with improving interagency coordination and strengthening child protection practices.





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**Recommendation:**

To streamline collaboration, reduce duplication, and strengthen impact, it is recommended that **Partners in Protecting Children transition from a subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board to a subcommittee of the Child Abuse Task Force.** This transition would allow the work to continue within a structure already dedicated to cross-agency coordination on child abuse prevention, investigation, and response, while preserving the original intent of Act 40 and HR 305.

This transition would also provide continuity in leadership and institutional knowledge.

- **Captain Joe Patout**, current Chair of the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee and a member of the Child Abuse Task Force, would continue in his leadership role.
- **Amanda Moody**, current Secretary and a Task Force member, would continue in that capacity.
- **Hon. Kristin Russell and Michele Shelton**, both Task Force members and active participants in the Partners Subcommittee, would remain engaged.
- Current subcommittee members who are not formal members of the Task Force could continue to participate in an **advisory or informal capacity**, ensuring broad stakeholder input while maintaining alignment with Task Force membership requirements.



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**Initial Focus Area:**

Consistent with the intent of Act 40, the initial focus of the Partners in Protecting Children Subcommittee under the Child Abuse Task Force would be to **examine and strengthen communication protocols between DCFS and law enforcement agencies**. Establishing a clear, targeted focus will support measurable progress, practical recommendations, and renewed momentum for the group's work.

This recommended transition represents a thoughtful evolution of the legislative intent behind Act 40 and HR 305. It honors the commitment of the Legislature and the Children's Cabinet to protect Louisiana's children while ensuring the work is carried out within a clear, collaborative, and effective structure that maximizes impact across systems.



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**The Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, R.S. 46: 2605.1**

The Council members and the agencies they represent are listed below:

- Ursula Anderson- Louisiana Children's Trust Fund
- Susana Schowen, Designee is Kaffia Arvie- Secretary of the Louisiana Workforce Commission
- Wanda August- Citizen who has demonstrated a commitment to the rearing of grandchildren by grandparents.
- Regina Barrow- Senate
- Alfred Carter- Deputy Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Youth Services, Office of Juvenile Justice.
- Kathy Coleman- Representative of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Information Center
- Andrea Couch- Citizen who has demonstrated a commitment to the rearing of grandchildren by grandparents.
- Carl Dillon, Jr.- Nominated by Children's Cabinet Advisory Board
- LaVondra Dobbs- Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana
- Will Francis- National Association of Social Workers
- Betty Grant- Department of Children and Family Services, SNAP
- Joanna Arrington- Louisiana Department of Health, Behavioral Health
- Merieta "Rita" Hathorne- Citizen who has demonstrated a commitment to the rearing of grandchildren by grandparents.
- Gregory Hughes- Access to Justice Committee of the Louisiana State Bar
- Michelle Joubert- Louisiana Head Start Association





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- Charlene Julien- Louisiana Department of Health, Representative for Medicaid Eligibility
- Representative Denise Marcelle- House of Representatives
- Tarneisha Mayfield- Department of Children and Family Services, Foster Care Program;  
Replaced by Christy Tate in October of 2025
- Otha "Curtis" Nelson, Jr.- Louisiana State Bar Association
- Ken Oertling- Louisiana Association of School Superintendents; Replaced by Jeff Powell in July  
of 2025
- Amanda Smith, Designee is Lakeisha Robertson- Office of Elderly Affairs
- Pam Schooler- Department of Education, Childcare Assistance Program
- Amanda Shackelford- Citizen who has demonstrated a commitment to the rearing of  
grandchildren by grandparents.
- Julie Starns- Department of Children and Family Services, Kinship Care
- Anna Williamson- Agenda for Children
- Jolie V. Williamson- Executive Director of the Children's Cabinet



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**The Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, R.S. 46: 2605.1**

The Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren is statutorily established as a subcommittee of the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board pursuant to R.S. 46:2605.1 to address the unique needs and challenges faced by grandparents and other relative caregivers raising children in Louisiana. The Council serves as a resource to the state by examining issues affecting grand families and advising the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board, executive agencies, and the Legislature on policies, programs, and practices impacting kinship caregivers.

Throughout 2025, the Council convened publicly noticed meetings to advance its statutory responsibilities and to support coordination between grandparents, service providers, and government partners. Meetings were chaired by Vice Chair Kathy Coleman and supported administratively by the Children's Cabinet. Agendas reflected a structured approach to governance, including approval of minutes, officer nominations and votes, introduction of new members, and subcommittee-driven discussions.

A primary focus of the Council's work in 2025 was the development of issue-specific subcommittee priorities addressing family stability, food insecurity (hunger), and legal needs impacting grandparents raising grandchildren. These priority areas informed the development of draft recommendations intended to improve access to legal support, address food insecurity



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among grandparent-headed households, and strengthen resource coordination for grand families statewide.

In addition to formal Council business, meetings included legal workshops designed to provide grandparents and kinship caregivers with practical information related to custody, guardianship, and navigating child-serving systems. These workshops supported the Council's statutory role in promoting education and awareness for grandparents who may lack access to accurate or timely information regarding the care and custody of their grandchildren.

As part of its advisory function, the Council advanced draft recommendations to the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board focused on improving access to information and coordinated resources for grand families. These included recommendations supporting the development of a Grand Families and Kinship Care Resource Portal, enhanced access to legal representation, and targeted strategies to address food insecurity among grandparent-headed households. These recommendations were submitted for review and consideration and are pending formal adoption by the Council.

Taken together, the Council's work in 2025 reflects a continued commitment to strengthening support systems for grandparents raising grandchildren through structured governance, targeted subcommittee work, educational outreach, and policy-informed recommendations. The Council remains an important component of the Children's Cabinet framework, contributing to statewide





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efforts to improve stability, access to services, and long-term outcomes for grand families across Louisiana.

**Recommendations to the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board:**

*These recommendations have been developed by the Council for consideration and have not yet been formally adopted.*

**Legal Recommendation**

The Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren formally recommends enhanced statewide support for legal representation and requests dedicated funding to meet the growing legal needs of grandparents and kinship caregivers across Louisiana.

As the number of grandparents assuming primary caregiving responsibilities continues to increase, so do the legal complexities associated with securing safe, stable, and permanent custody arrangements for the children in their care. To effectively support these families, the Council strongly advocates for accessible legal representation in all regions of the state.

Legal services should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Preparation and execution of custody and guardianship documentation
- Legal consultations for grandparents navigating custodial transitions.



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- Court representation when required.
- Notarization of essential documents, including those involving incarcerated parents
- Assistance with any legal documentation necessary to ensure the safe transfer of custody.

The Council further recognizes that cost remains a significant barrier for many grand families.

Accordingly, funding is requested to cover essential legal expenses, including:

- Legal consultations
- Court costs and associated legal fees.
- Paternity testing when required for custody proceedings.
- Other legal services necessary to secure the safety and well-being of children.

To provide these services statewide, the Council estimates a funding need of approximately \$500,000. This investment would directly reduce legal barriers, promote permanency, and safeguard the best interests of children being raised by grandparents.

The Council respectfully requests that the Louisiana Legislature consider allocating funding and resources to support this initiative. Ensuring access to qualified legal assistance for grandparents statewide is critical to protecting Louisiana's most vulnerable children.



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**Hunger / Food Insecurity Recommendation**

Louisiana faces a significant challenge related to food insecurity among grandparent-headed households. As of 2025, Louisiana ranks fourth nationally for the percentage of children living with grandparents, with approximately 117,859 children residing in grandparent-headed households and nearly 65,000 living without either parent present. Factors contributing to this trend include parental substance abuse, incarceration, illness, and economic hardship.

A 2023 Feeding America report found that nearly 20% of grandparent-headed households in Louisiana experience food insecurity, a rate significantly higher than the national household average. Many grandparents are retired, living on fixed incomes, or have limited earning capacity. The financial strain of raising grandchildren often exceeds their available resources.

A critical gap exists for families who, despite financial hardship, do not qualify for SNAP benefits due to income levels marginally above eligibility thresholds. This leaves many grand families vulnerable to chronic food insecurity.

To address this need, the Council recommends \$2,500,000 in funding to provide quarterly financial assistance to grandparent-headed households. Priority would be given to families denied SNAP benefits due to income thresholds that do not reflect actual household expenses. Quarterly disbursements would provide consistent support, allowing families to purchase nutritious food and reduce financial stress.





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The goal is to ensure that no grandchild in Louisiana experiences food insecurity due to gaps in available support for their caregivers.

#### **Resource Hub for Grand Families Recommendation**

The Council requests \$5,400 in funding to establish a comprehensive resource hub designed to support grandparents raising grandchildren through both digital and non-digital access points. This initiative acknowledges that many grandparents may not be digitally fluent and require alternative methods for accessing information and support.

The program will include:

- A dedicated, user-friendly website
- A blast text subscription service for timely updates
- Printed handouts distributed directly to families and community locations.

#### **Itemized Cost Estimate**

##### **Website Development and Maintenance**

- Domain name acquisition: \$50/year
- Website design and setup (one-time): \$2,000



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- Website hosting: \$50/month (\$600/year)
- Content development and curation (one-time): \$1,000

**Blast Text Subscription**

- \$75/month (\$900/year)

**Handout Production and Distribution**

**Printing and design (one-time): \$700**

**Postage and distribution: \$150**

**Total Estimated Initial Funding Request: \$5,400**

- Website development & maintenance: \$3,650
- Blast text service: \$900
- Handout production & distribution: \$850

This investment will enable the launch of a sustainable resource hub that supports grand families through accessible, practical, and reliable information.



## **LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S CABINET**

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#### **Family Stability Subcommittee**

#### **Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in Louisiana**

#### **Key Data**

- Louisiana ranks 4th nationally in children living with grandparents.
- Approximately 117,859 children live in grandparent-headed households: 65,000 live without either parent present.
- Approximately 63,498 grandparents are raising grandchildren.
- 26.7% live in poverty; 27.5% report having a disability.
- Grandparents provide a critical safety net that prevents foster care placement for thousands of children.

#### **Focused Family Stability Recommendations**

##### **1. Leverage the Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP)**

- Expand outreach and eligibility by increasing income caps from 150% to 200% of the federal poverty level.
- Increase subsidy amounts to better align with foster care payments.





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- Use KCSP funds to stabilize housing and cover basic needs.
2. Enhance Legal Support Services
- Expand free legal clinics and consultations statewide.
  - Increase awareness of Louisiana's De Facto Custodian and Standby Guardian laws
3. Strengthen Caregiver Health and Support Networks
- Utilize the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs and Councils on Aging to provide respite care, counseling, peer support, and emergency assistance.
  - Support the annual Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference
4. Improve Navigation of Educational Resources
- Develop Kinship Care Navigator programs to assist grandparents with school enrollment, services, and advocacy.
  - Coordinate with DCFS for integrated family support services.



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**5. Formalize Cross-Agency Coordination**

- Strengthen interagency coordination across DCFS, GOEA, health services, legal aid, housing, and education to improve service delivery for grand families.

**Goal**

Connect Louisiana's grandparent caregivers to existing programs and funding streams to improve family stability, reduce financial hardship, and promote the long-term well-being of children and caregivers in grandparent-headed households.



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**Children Youth Planning Boards, R.S. 46:1941.2 (A, B)**

**Expansion of Children and Youth Planning Boards and Truancy Solutions Collaboration**

In 2025, the Children's Cabinet made significant progress in expanding and strengthening Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPBs) across Louisiana. At the beginning of the year, only two active CYPBs were operating statewide. Through targeted outreach, technical assistance, and cross-agency coordination, the number of active CYPBs increased to eleven by the end of 2025. In addition, four judicial districts are currently in the process of forming new boards, and nine additional districts have formally requested resources and guidance to begin the formation process. This growth reflects a renewed statewide commitment to local, collaborative solutions addressing the needs of children, youth, and families.

In February 2025, the Children's Cabinet formally voted to pursue a Solutions Summit on Truancy to address chronic absenteeism and its impact on children and families. Due to the absence of dedicated funding for the initiative, Executive Director Jolie V. Williamson initiated strategic outreach to key leadership partners, requesting a collaborative, cross-agency approach. As a result, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), the Louisiana Supreme Court, and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) formed a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Children's Cabinet to advance this effort.





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From February through September 2025, these agencies met regularly to plan and coordinate the Solutions Summit on Truancy. The Summit ultimately brought together more than 400 participants representing a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including superintendents, school administrators, police juries, social workers, district attorneys, juvenile and family court judges, law enforcement, state agencies, and community-based organizations. This unprecedented collaboration across the executive, legislative, judicial, and education sectors marked the first time such a comprehensive, statewide truancy initiative had been undertaken in Louisiana.

During the Summit, Executive Director Williamson delivered a 30-minute training on Children and Youth Planning Boards, highlighting their statutory authority, structure, and role in addressing truancy through coordinated local planning. This training served as a catalyst for renewed interest in CYPBs and sparked further cross-agency collaboration to support their expansion statewide.

Following the Summit, Chief Justice John L. Weimer of the Louisiana Supreme Court issued a [formal letter](#) encouraging engagement and support for Children and Youth Planning Boards. This letter was endorsed and signed by seven state leaders, including Governor Jeff Landry, Chief Justice John L. Weimer, Attorney General Liz Murrill, State Superintendent of Education Dr. Cade Brumley, Louisiana Supreme Court Administrator Ronnie Morris, President of the Senate Cameron Henry, and Speaker of the House Phillip DeVillier. This unified endorsement represents an unprecedented show of collaboration across all three branches of government and



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underscores the statewide commitment to strengthening local systems of support for children and families.

Together, these efforts reflect a transformative year for the Children's Cabinet, demonstrating the power of coordinated leadership, cross-agency collaboration, and local engagement in addressing truancy and improving outcomes for Louisiana's children and youth.

Attached: [Joint Statement of Support - CYPB and Combat Truancy \(2\).pdf](#)

Attached: [Map of Louisiana showing Active Children and Youth Planning Boards as of December 2025.](#)



October 27, 2025

Fellow Public Servants,

### **Celebrating Leadership at the 2025 Solutions Summit**

Thank you for the leadership and engagement shown by your representatives at the 2025 Solutions Summit: *From Truancy to Triumph, From Absence to Opportunity*. With more than 375 participants, including numerous public officials and representatives from nearly all of Louisiana's 64 parishes, the Summit demonstrated a strong statewide commitment to collaborative solutions.

### **Regional Collaboration in Action**

Participants were grouped by region, allowing discussions of statewide challenges to be tailored to the unique needs of their communities. Around these tables, district attorney and public defender offices, judges, teachers, school administrators, state education leadership, and FINS officers exchanged ideas—each sharing their power to make change while recognizing their limitations. This underscores why collaboration is essential.

### **Your Action is Needed to take the Next Steps**

This spirit of collaboration is reflected in Children and Youth Planning Boards, which statutorily shall be created in each parish.<sup>1</sup> These Boards place children at the center of local efforts. We encourage you to support your public servants in establishing and strengthening these Boards, helping turn shared ideas into real, community-driven solutions. More information on these Boards and how to establish one in each parish is included in the attached letter.

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<sup>1</sup> La. R.S. 46:1941.5 provides "[t]here shall be a children and youth planning board created and established in each judicial district by enactment of appropriate resolutions by the governing authority of each parish in that district. The board shall provide for the preparation of a comprehensive plan for the development, implementation, and operation of services for children and youth."



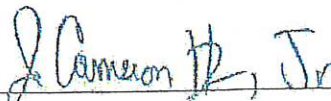
Continued Progress

The Summit proved a great success in gathering those critical stakeholders in your community together to discuss the challenge of truancy at your local level. More progress is to come, and we look forward to your continued support of this initiative and your local leaders.

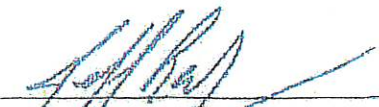
Sincerely,



John L. Weimer, Chief Justice  
Louisiana Supreme Court



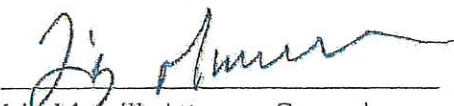
Cameron Henry  
President of the Louisiana Senate



Jeff Landry, Governor  
State of Louisiana



Phillip DeVillier  
Speaker of the Louisiana House of  
Representatives



Liz Murrill, Attorney General  
State of Louisiana



Dr. Cade Brumley  
Louisiana Superintendent of  
Education



Ronnie Morris  
President, Board of Elementary and  
Secondary Education

Encl: Annual Letter from Louisiana Children's Cabinet, Office of the Governor



Jeff Landry  
Governor

# State of Louisiana

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
P.O. BOX 94004  
BATON ROUGE  
70804-9004

October 27, 2025

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to bring to your attention the requirements of R.S. 46:1941.5 and Act 555 of 2004, which mandates the establishment of a Children Youth Planning Board (CYPB) in each Judicial District in the state of Louisiana.

According R.S. 46:1941.5, CYPB's shall be created and established in each JDC by the governing authority of each parish in that district.

"There shall be a children and youth planning board created and established in each judicial district by enactment of appropriate resolutions by the **governing authority of each parish in that district**. The board shall provide for the preparation of a comprehensive plan for the development, implementation, and operation of services for children and youth."

According to Act 555 of 2004, "Each judicial district shall establish a Children Youth Planning Board to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for services to children and youth in the district." This legislative act underscores the critical need for local planning and coordination to address the needs of our youth and ensure their well-being.

As Executive Director of the Louisiana Children's Cabinet, I would like to confirm whether your district currently has a CYPB in place. If so, please notify us of your meeting schedule so that we may attend and support your efforts. If your district has not yet established a CYPB, it is important to note that this would be a non-compliance with state law.

To assist you in meeting these requirements, I would like to extend our support and resources. The Children's Cabinet Advisory Board has established the Family Stability Subcommittee, which is specifically focused on aiding Judicial Districts in fulfilling the compliance criteria outlined in this Act. This subcommittee is Chaired by Dr. Christian Vige'. Furthermore, Calcasieu Parish has successfully implemented a model CYPB, and Mr. Anthony Celestine, a pivotal figure in its development, has kindly offered to provide expert guidance and assistance to other districts in establishing their boards. His extensive expertise would be invaluable in facilitating the formation of a CYPB in your district and ensuring full compliance with state law.

Please feel free to reach out to us at 225-219-4999 or [jolie.williamson@la.gov](mailto:jolie.williamson@la.gov) to discuss how we can support your district in setting up a CYPB. We are committed to providing any necessary resources and assistance to help you achieve compliance and enhance services for the children and youth in your area.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response and to working together to support the well-being of our youth.

Please fill out the following form: <https://forms.gle/yn9m7CzcCAFVfuHF8>

Sincerely,

**Jolie V. Williamson, M.S.**

Director of Children's Programs

Executive Director of the Children's Cabinet

Office of Governor Jeff Landry

Phone: (225) 219-4999

[jolie.williamson@la.gov](mailto:jolie.williamson@la.gov)



# Louisiana Judicial COLLEGE

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Judge Brady O'Callaghan  
*Secretary*

Chief Judge Tracey Flemings-  
Davillier  
*Treasurer*

Judge Naldisha Ervin-Knott  
*Immediate Past President*

October 21, 2025

Ms. Jolie Williamson  
Office of Governor Jeff Landry  
1051 N. Third Street  
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear Ms. Williamson,

On behalf of the Louisiana Judicial College, thank you for your contribution to the 2025 Fall Judges Conference. Attendance at this event surpassed our expectations, no doubt because of the quality presentations and subject-matter expertise offered by speakers like you.

Developing a curriculum for judges with their varied training needs is a challenge that could not be met without the engagement and commitment of knowledgeable presenters at Louisiana Judicial College conferences. The time you spent researching and preparing for your session was significant, and did not go unnoticed, nor unappreciated. In addition to your role as speaker, your very attendance at the conference offers others the opportunity to network with you and perhaps build future relationships, an objective the College certainly promotes.

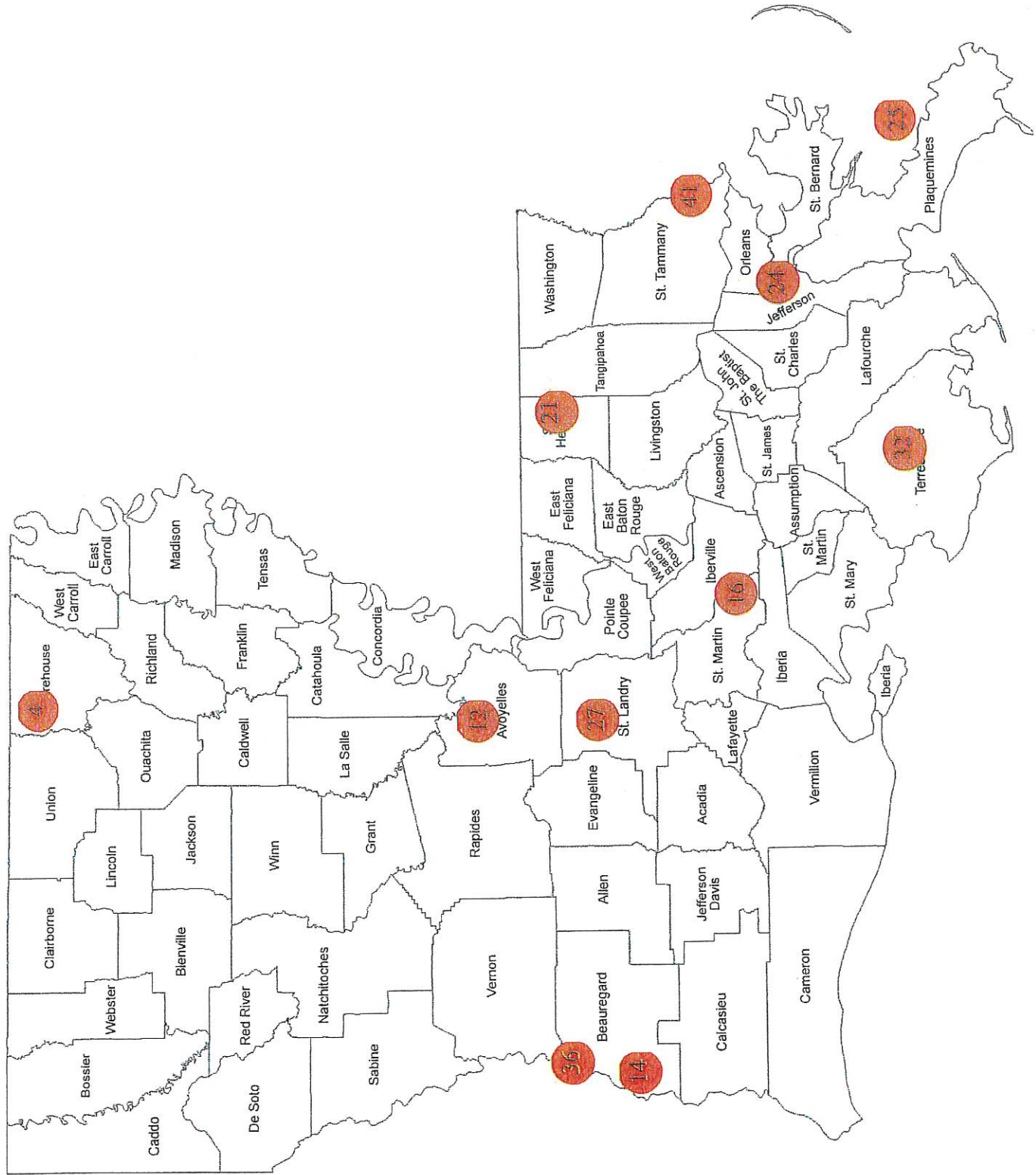
Should you have suggestions for future College programming, or feedback about your experience as a presenter, please contact me at your convenience at 504-310-2643 or [MSchachtman@lasc.org](mailto:MSchachtman@lasc.org).

With Appreciation,



Michael Schachtman  
Executive Director  
Louisiana Judicial College

## PLANNING BOARDS





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**Children's Budget, R.S. 46: 2604**

In accordance with statute RS 46:2604 F, the Cabinet is tasked with coordinating efforts with the Office of Planning and Budget in the Division of Administration to monitor changes in the children's budget throughout the fiscal year. As part of this process, the Office of Planning and Budget designates an analyst to oversee the children's budget. Currently, Darrilyn Favorite serves as the designated analyst from the Department of Administration responsible for tracking and reporting on the Children's Budget.

For your reference, please find the attached links to the Department of Administration's documents detailing the Fiscal Year 2025 Recommendations and Appropriated Funds:

- [FY25-26 ECSIB at Appropriated.xlsx](#)
- [childrensbudget fy25 recommended.pdf \(la.gov\)](#)
- <https://www.doa.la.gov/media/fdwizp2g/fy24-25-ecsib-at-appropriated-book.pdf>
- [childrensbudget fy25 appropriated.pdf \(la.gov\)](#)

These documents provide an overview of the fiscal decisions made for children's services and the allocation of resources for the upcoming fiscal year.





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**Louisiana Children's Trust Fund, R.S. 46: 2404**

**Overview of Louisiana Children's Trust Fund's 2024 Accomplishments**

The Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF) was established in 1983 following the passage of the Children's Trust Fund Act. This Act established a separate source of funds that is governed by a Board of Directors which is composed of cross-sector multi-disciplinary representatives. The responsibilities of the board include the development of a comprehensive State Plan for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and oversight of child abuse and neglect prevention programs. The board also ensures that best practices and evidence-based models are introduced and utilized by grantees and that programs are implemented with high quality and fidelity.

The Louisiana Children's Trust Fund operates as a quasi-government agency housed within the Governor's Office of Programs and Planning. Each year, federal dollars are received through the Administration for Children and Families Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grant in addition to the Statutory Dedicated funds obtained from duplicate birth certificate fees. LCTF utilizes these funds to provide reimbursement contracts to primary and secondary child abuse and neglect prevention programs. These programs provide support to strengthen the family system to prevent child abuse and neglect. All programs are funded after a highly competitive grant application process. Programs are also required to submit semi-annual evaluation reports to demonstrate outcomes for their populations served.



## **LOUISIANA CHILDREN'S CABINET**

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#### **The Mission of the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF):**

- "To prevent child abuse and neglect among Louisiana's children and families through building strong cross-sector partnerships and through increased child safety public awareness."

#### **The Purpose of the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF) is three-fold:**

- To support community-based efforts to develop, operate, expand, enhance, and coordinate initiatives, programs, and activities to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- To support the coordination of resources and activities to better strengthen and support families to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.
- To foster understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of diverse populations to effectively prevent and treat child abuse and neglect.

In 2025, the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF) made significant strides in its mission to prevent child abuse and neglect, promote child safety, and strengthen families across the state. Through a variety of initiatives, campaigns, and partnerships, LCTF continued to raise awareness, support local programs, and engage the community in efforts to protect Louisiana's children. Below are the key accomplishments of the LCTF in 2025:



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1. **Five-Year State Plan:** In 2025, LCTF completed its Five-Year State Plan, establishing a comprehensive framework to guide statewide efforts on behalf of children and families in Louisiana. The development of the plan was conducted in close collaboration with policymakers, state agencies, and key stakeholders to address the most pressing and emerging needs of children and families across the state.

The plan includes the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data from all nine regions of Louisiana, which played a critical role in informing its development. This regional, data-driven approach strengthened the plan's responsiveness to local conditions, enhanced cross-sector coordination, and supported evidence-based decision-making. The Five-Year State Plan now serves as a guiding document for policy development, program implementation, and accountability, reinforcing the LCTF's commitment to strategic, data-informed, and collaborative governance.

2. **4th Annual Child Abuse Prevention Conference:** LCTF successfully hosted the 4th Annual Child Abuse Prevention Conference, bringing together professionals, advocates, and community leaders to share knowledge, strategies, and resources to prevent child abuse and promote child well-being. The conference provided valuable opportunities for networking and collaboration, enhancing statewide efforts to address child abuse prevention.





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3. **Sponsorship:** In 2025, LCTF successfully provided sponsorship support for several statewide conferences that aligned with its mission to strengthen families and improve child well-being. Sponsored events included the *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference*, the *Solutions Summit on Truancy*, and the *Together We Can Conference*. These sponsorships supported cross-sector collaboration, professional development, and the dissemination of best practices addressing critical issues impacting children and families across Louisiana.
4. **Monthly Coffee and Conversations:** To foster continuous dialogue and community engagement, LCTF hosted monthly "Coffee and Conversations" sessions. These informal meetings provided a space for stakeholders, partners, and community members to connect, share insights, and discuss the challenges and successes of child safety initiatives as well as gain CEU and CLE credit.
5. **Program Grantees and Grantee Conference:** LCTF continued to support organizations throughout the state through its grant programs, funding initiatives aimed at preventing child abuse and strengthening families. The annual Grantee Conference offered a platform for grantees to learn from one another, share best practices, and enhance their impact on child safety in Louisiana communities.
6. **Programs Funded:** In 2025, the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund (LCTF) allocated significant resources to prevent child abuse and neglect, support families, and promote



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child safety. The organization funded grants to **35 programs and 7 conferences** statewide and distributed a total of **\$833,445** to various child abuse prevention initiatives. These programs, selected through a highly competitive grant process, focused on strengthening families and raising awareness about child safety. These efforts played a crucial role in enhancing the wellbeing of Louisiana's children and ensuring the effectiveness of community-based prevention strategies.

7. **Campaigns:** LCTF launched and supported several important safety campaigns aimed at raising awareness about common risks to children and promoting preventive actions:
- **Know Before You Go:** This campaign provided critical information to parents and caregivers about child safety when leaving their children with sitters.
  - **Look Before You Lock:** Aimed at preventing child heatstroke deaths in hot cars, this campaign encouraged parents and caregivers to double-check their vehicles to ensure children are not left behind.
  - **Swim Safety:** Focused on drowning prevention, this campaign educated families about water safety practices and the importance of supervision to reduce drownings in children.



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- **Coloring Book on Safety:** To promote child safety in a creative and engaging way, LCTF developed and distributed a child-friendly coloring book on safety. This educational tool was designed to teach young children about personal safety in an accessible and fun manner, laying the groundwork for early awareness and prevention.
- **Put the Phone Down:** Designed to reach not only children and youth, but families, this campaign recognized that cell phone distraction impacts individuals of all ages. By promoting responsible cell phone use across age groups, this initiative supported LCTF's broader mission to strengthen family engagement and enhance child well-being.

8. **Proclamation:** LCTF successfully coordinated the signing of the *Put the Phone Down August* proclamation, formally designating August as *Put the Phone Down Month*. The proclamation was distributed to state agencies, key partners, and LCTF grantees to ensure broad visibility, coordination, and statewide support. In addition, LCTF participated in a statewide radio network interview to highlight and promote the *Put the Phone Down* campaign.

Through these initiatives and more, the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund made a measurable impact in 2025, working tirelessly to create a safer environment for children and families across





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the state. LCTF remains committed to its mission of preventing child abuse and neglect, with a focus on collaboration, education, and advocacy in the years ahead.



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**Program Evaluation Summary (2025)**

*(Required by R.S. 46:260- evaluation of programs, service delivery, and future planning priorities)*

In accordance with statutory requirements, this section provides a high-level evaluation of programs, initiatives, and service delivery efforts under the Children's Cabinet during the 2025 reporting year. The analysis reflects measurable progress, statewide engagement, and system needs identified across Louisiana's child-serving networks.

**Strengths and Progress Achieved**

- **Reestablished Cabinet Function and Accountability:**

The Children's Cabinet and Advisory Board operated with structured agendas, regular meetings, designated designees under HB 137, and increased transparency, restoring governance expectations and improving statewide visibility.

- **Subcommittee Impact and Productivity:**

All CCAB Subcommittees submitted formal budget priorities and policy recommendations in literacy, behavioral health, vulnerable youth, early childhood, family stability and kinship care-demonstrating strong engagement and mission alignment.

- **Children and Youth Planning Board Expansion:**

Nine CYPBs became active or confirmed active in 2025, with additional judicial districts



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entering formation. Collaboration with the Louisiana Supreme Court strengthened local engagement and onboarding momentum.

- Judicial engagement increased significantly following CYPB training delivered at the Louisiana Judicial College, which provided judges with statutory context and implementation guidance.

- **Truancy Reduction and Cross-System Partnerships:**

The Solution Summit on Truancy united the Louisiana Supreme Court, LDOE, BESE, LCTF, local governments, and district leaders, establishing the state's first coordinated, multi-agency plan to address chronic absenteeism.

- **Prevention and Public Awareness Impact:**

The Louisiana Children's Trust Fund expanded prevention outreach through statewide safety campaigns, public resources, grantee support, conference initiatives, and ongoing community education.

- **Kinship & Family Stability Improvements:**

The Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren advanced targeted recommendations addressing legal needs, food insecurity, and kinship navigation-strengthening support for grand families statewide.





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#### **Challenges and System Gaps Identified**

- **Local Service Delivery Variation:**

Parish-level capacity differences continue to limit consistency in CYPB activation, juvenile service delivery, and vulnerable youth supports.

- **Behavioral Health Service Shortages:**

Youth mental health demands exceed available provider capacity, particularly in rural regions, and waitlists remain a barrier to timely access.

- **Infrastructure and Data-Sharing Limitations:**

Fragmented communication and lack of interoperable systems between education, juvenile justice, Medicaid, and child welfare hinder real-time information-sharing.

- **Prevention Funding Instability:**

Communities and providers continue to report limited, year-to-year funding for local diversion centers, truancy prevention, and kinship legal services.

#### **Priorities and Direction for 2026**

- Provide regional CYPB judicial training in partnership with the Louisiana Supreme Court;
- Sustain statewide truancy strategy development following the Summit;
- Expand behavioral/mental health coordination across LDH, schools, and youth providers;
- Strengthen data, reporting, and accountability infrastructure for prevention outcomes;



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- Advance kinship, literacy, legal access, and early childhood initiatives through CCAB recommendations.

### **Conclusion**

As we conclude 2025, the Louisiana Children's Cabinet stands stronger, more unified, and more strategically aligned than ever before. This year marked a period of significant rebuilding, innovation, and partnership across agencies and communities who share a common mission—to improve outcomes for Louisiana's children and families.

Through renewed Cabinet structure, cross-agency collaboration, and strengthened judicial partnerships, we expanded statewide accountability and advanced the implementation of Children and Youth Planning Boards across all regions. The unprecedented Solution Summit on Truancy brought together the Louisiana Supreme Court, LDOE, BESE, LCTF, and the Children's Cabinet to address chronic absenteeism as a unified state priority. Across our advisory board subcommittees, work continued to advance literacy, improve behavioral and mental health access, support vulnerable youth, and strengthen systems serving kinship and grandparent caregivers.

The Children's Trust Fund continued to deepen prevention efforts through expanded campaigns, including "Know Before You Go," "Look Before You Lock," "Swim Safety," and the new #PutThePhoneDown distracted-caregiver initiative. LCTF programming, grantee support, and



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state-level awareness proclamations further demonstrated Louisiana's commitment to proactive safety and education for families.

These efforts reflect meaningful forward movement in the areas of education, prevention, accountability, equity of access, and system reform. They also highlight the remarkable work of local leaders, state agencies, subcommittees, advocates, community organizations, courts, and school partners who made this progress possible.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Children's Cabinet will continue strengthening judicial partnerships, advancing CYPB training and compliance, expanding statewide prevention strategies, increasing visibility through public proclamations and campaigns, and driving intentional cross-agency collaboration that breaks down silos and unites Louisiana's children-serving network.

We remain committed to ensuring that every child in Louisiana has access to the safety, stability, and opportunities they deserve. With continued collaboration and collective leadership, we will build on this year's momentum and keep moving the state forward for children and families.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Jolie V. Williamson*

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Submit an annual report to the governor, the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, the House Committee on Health and Welfare, and any other legislative committee that requests a copy of the annual report, by January thirty-first summarizing the accomplishments of the past year, providing an evaluation of individual programs and the delivery of services, and indicating specific goals and budget priorities for the next fiscal year. 46:2603.