



Nebraska Children's Commission
521 South 14th Street, Suite 401
Lincoln, NE 68508

November 28, 2017

Patrick O'Donnell, Clerk of the Legislature
State Capitol, Room 2018
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

Dear Mr. O'Donnell,

Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4218(4) requires the Strengthening Families Act Committee of the Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission) to provide a report to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Governor by December 15, 2017, regarding initial and ongoing implementation of the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act and related efforts to improve normalcy for children in foster care and related populations. The Commission reviewed and approved the attached report at their November 14, 2017 meeting.

Respectfully,

David Newell, Chairperson
Nebraska Children's Commission

Sarah Helvey, Co-Chair
Strengthening Families Act Committee

Vernon Davis, Co-Chair
Strengthening Families Act Committee

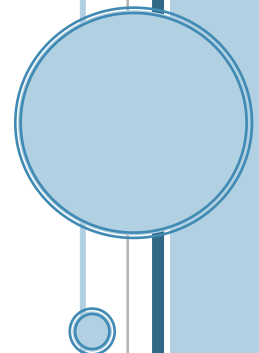
Enclosure:
SFA Committee 2017 Report (Final-Legislature)

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT COMMITTEE 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Submitted Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4218(4)

November 2017



Strengthening Families Act Committee

2017 Annual Report

Statutory charge: The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Committee shall monitor and make recommendations regarding the implementation in Nebraska of the federal [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183](#), as such act existed on January 1, 2017, and the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act, [Neb. Rev. Stat. [§43-4701](#) to [§43-4715](#)].

Priorities

- Priority 1: Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Act
- Priority 2: Promote normalcy as the foundation to: prevent trafficking; address disparate impacts on minorities; and support the successful transition to adulthood
- Priority 3: Coordinate implementation with other policy making bodies

For more information or to get involved, please visit childrens.nebraska.gov, or email necc.contact@nebraska.gov.

Strengthening Families Act Committee 2017 Annual Report

Nebraska thrives when its families, youth, and children have healthy and productive lives and reach their full potential. Youth in child welfare out-of-home placements face extra challenges in accessing these protective factors due to past abuse and neglect, the trauma of removal from their homes, and moving around due to placement changes. All children who are state wards in out-of-home placements have incredible potential, and the Strengthening Families Act empowers families, foster parents, caseworkers, guardians ad litem and other stakeholders to support children's well-being.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

The Strengthening Families Act Committee (Committee) was created as the Normalcy Task Force under the umbrella of the Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission) to monitor and make recommendations related to Nebraska's implementation of the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183 (referred to in this document as the "Strengthening Families Act" or "SFA"). Nebraska's Strengthening Families Act, [LB746 \(2016\)](#), implements the federal SFA and initial stakeholder recommendations. Both the federal and state SFA represent a culture shift to allow children and youth to grow and thrive in less restrictive, more family-like environments and participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities. Additional legislation related to best practices in implementation was passed as [LB225 \(2017\)](#). The Committee has met quarterly in 2017 to accomplish its statutory mandates.

Strengthening Families Act Goals and Priorities

The Strengthening Families Act Committee has identified the following three priorities to guide its work. This report will provide strategic action recommendations to promote these three priorities, and a matrix of the information is available at [Appendix A](#).

1. Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts.
2. Promote normalcy as the foundation to:
 - a. Preventing trafficking;
 - b. Reducing disparate impacts on minorities; and
 - c. Successful transition to adulthood.
3. Coordinate implementation with other policy-making bodies.

Priority 1: Monitor the Strengthening Families Act

The Legislature charged the group with monitoring the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts, and the group has made this task its first priority. The Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services (DHHS-CFS), service providers, foster parents and system-involved youth provide regular feedback and updates. The Committee understands that implementation requires time and coordination, and strives to serve as a forum for stakeholders to exchange information, provide support, and create innovative solutions to the challenges facing families, children and youth in the child welfare system.

Monitoring Activities

To comply with this mandate, the SFA Committee engages in the below monitoring activities:

- Serve as a collaborative forum to support the implementation of this important Act.
- Engage with families and youth to receive their feedback and allow community members to participate actively in the implementation.
- Receive updates from stakeholders on implementation.
- Provide recommendations and feedback to the legislature, Governor, and stakeholders.

Implementation of 2017 Legislation

In the 2017, the Nebraska State Legislature and Governor Pete Ricketts approved a number of additional provisions to support the implementation of the Strengthening Families Act.

- DHHS was tasked with promulgating rules and regulations requiring additional training for foster parents on recognizing human trafficking, including sex and labor trafficking. ([Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4707](#)).
 - **Update:** DHHS-CFS has implemented the training for parents and has begun training foster parents in collaboration with the Child Advocacy Centers and other stakeholders.
- The legislation provides that DHHS must also require, as a condition of each contract entered into by a child-care institution to provide foster care, a written normalcy plan describing how the child-care institution will ensure that all children have access to age or developmentally appropriate activities to be filed with the department and a normalcy report regarding the implementation of the normalcy plan to be filed with the department annually by June 30.
- DHHS and Probation are required to establish procedures for the immediate dissemination of a current picture and information about a child who is missing from a foster care or out-of-home placement to appropriate third parties, which may include law enforcement agencies or persons engaged in procuring, gathering, writing, editing, or disseminating news or other information to the public. Any information released to a third party is subject to state and federal confidentiality laws and must not include that the child is under the care, custody, or supervision of the department or under the

supervision of probation. Such dissemination by probation shall be authorized by an order of a judge or court.

- **Update:** The Administrative Office of Probation has implemented this process in collaboration with the youths' parents. The Committee commends the Administrative Office of Probation for its work on this important provision.
- **Update:** The Department of Health and Human Services is in the process of implementing this provision, though additional legislation may be needed. The Strengthening Families Act Committee and the Nebraska Children's Commission will continue to monitor progress and advocate for legislation as necessary.

Strategic Recommendations to Support Implementation of the Strengthening Families Act

The Strengthening Families Act Committee will undertake the below strategic actions to support the continued implementation of 2017 legislation:

- Collaborate and provide feedback on regulations required by LB225 and await the promulgation of regulations in accordance with state statute.
- Provide in depth review and analysis of the Normalcy Plan reports as required by LB225.
- Continue to receive updates on the status of DHHS's procedures for immediately releasing a photograph of state wards who are missing, and advocate for any legislation to promote compliance with this provision.
- Conduct an analysis of existing grievance processes to determine if additional legislation or policy is necessary. The updated report of the Grievance Subcommittee is available at <https://goo.gl/FrQg71>.
- Support the DHHS-CFS and the Court Improvement Project as they create the Bill of Rights and Know Your Rights Guide in collaboration with the Youth Citizen Review Panel.
- The Community and Family Voice Subcommittee will remain available to serve as a forum for engagement and feedback from the community and families.

Strategic Recommendations for Stakeholder Implementation

- The Strengthening Families Act Committee continues to recommend a comprehensive Bill of Rights that includes the rights identified in the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Report from 2016, available at <https://goo.gl/86CKRv>.
- The right to cultural activities should include access to activities that reflect the cultural practices and religious beliefs of the youth and family.
- Youth need to be regularly notified of their rights in a developmentally and age appropriate manner.
- Youth need an enforcement mechanism and grievance or complaint process for their rights.

- Youth and families need more information and awareness of the resources that are available to them.

Priority 2: Normalcy as the Foundation to a) Preventing Trafficking; b) Reducing Disparate Impact on Minorities; and c) Successful Transition to Adulthood

Normalcy is about supporting youth to reach their full potential by accessing protective factors like extracurricular activities, employment, and healthy supportive connections. Foster parents are empowered by the SFA to use the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard, which allows the freedom to make decisions as a caregiver that support normalcy, such as consenting to sleepovers, enrollment in sports activities, and participation in extracurricular activities. This connection to normalcy allows youth to build the foundation of protective factors needed to reach their full potential.

Priority 2(a): Normalcy as the Foundation to Prevent Trafficking

All youth in Nebraska deserve to be free from exploitation and experience as much normalcy as possible to help them reach their full potential in a safe and healthy community. Research consistently shows that when youth enter into out of home placements, they are vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking. Nebraska's dedication to the well-being of its children and the safety of its communities shows in recent legislative changes and stakeholder initiatives to prevent and respond to this crime and support the victims.

Strategic Action Steps to Support Trafficking Prevention

Culture Change

- Promote a system wide culture change where youth are treated as stakeholders would want their own children treated.
- Normalcy activities should go beyond extracurricular activities, and should include acquiring life skills, such as driving, jobs skills and experience, and social activities such as prom and homecoming dances.
- Members of the public must be able to identify the trafficking of minors, and understand it as child maltreatment that requires reporting to law enforcement or the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

Placement for Trafficked or High Risk Youth

- Child placing agency and DHHS-CFS staff must have access to the training they need to identify and support foster parents who can provide placement to this vulnerable population. When foster parents with these skills are identified and empowered to support youth who are trafficked, it is more likely that youth can safely stay in their placements and heal both inside and out from the trauma they experienced.
- The Committee commends the DHHS-CFS for their efforts in establishing training for foster parents related to identifying and responding to trafficking.

- Serve trafficked youth or youth at high risk of being trafficked in their own homes when possible. If such a youth requires out-of-home placement, they should be placed in accordance with this evidence based principle or the least restrictive and least intrusive placement.
- The Nebraska Children’s Commission should work with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administrative Office of Probation, providers, families, and other stakeholders to make recommendations on a treatment level out-of-home placement for youth who have been victims of trafficking. This trauma informed level of care should include a multi-disciplinary team and individualized treatment. The funding source should allow youth to receive treatment as long as needed.

System Practices to Prevent Missing Youth

- DHHS-CFS and the Administrative Office of Probation should establish a process for the youth to work with caseworker or probation officer, foster parents, biological parents (if applicable), and Strengthening Families Act Advisor/Advocate (if youth is child welfare involved) to create a plan to prevent youth from going missing from care by allowing them to designate a “cooling off” area.
- Professionals should support youth in out-of-home placements by allowing them to designate a code word that signals a need to have a confidential conversation outside of the placement.

System Response to Reports of Trafficking

- Design or designate a centralized procedure to receive reports and coordinate the response to trafficked minors.
- DHHS-CFS responds to reports of trafficking with an investigation within 24 hours, whether or not the trafficker is a third party perpetrator or a caregiver, and whether or not the trafficker is living in the home.

More Information is available in the Trafficking Subcommittee Annual Report, available <https://goo.gl/eZ9Zew>.

Priority 2(b): Normalcy as the Foundation to Address Disparate Impact on Minorities

The Normalcy Subcommittee has recognized normalcy as a powerful tool to connect minority youth with their communities and families. The Nebraska State Legislature has recognized the importance of race, culture, and identity for children in out-of-home care, as per [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4702](#). A larger percentage of youth in welfare placements are minorities compared to the overall percentage of minorities in Nebraska’s population. Minority youth and families have different experiences of the child welfare system, and the Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that normalcy is used as a tool to help all families and youth connect to their culture.

Strategic Action Steps to Address Disparate Impacts on Minority Children and Families.

- Normalcy activities and family contact should be used to attain the goals set forth in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and foster connections for youth with tribal affiliation to their families and tribes as much as possible.
- Minority youth deserve to have their holistic identities understood and respected. These youth are entitled to experience normalcy and have their rights respected in light of their holistic identity and individual experiences.
- Youth contact with individuals they identify as family should be a right, and contact should not be denied unless there exists a documented safety concern or a court order preventing contact.
- The diversity of family structures of youth who are minority, refugee/immigrant or youth with tribal affiliations should be recognized. Every culture has a distinct concept of who is included in a family, and may be broader than just immediate blood relations. Stakeholders must respect the rights of youth to spend time with individuals they identify as family. Discussions of who the youth considers family should be youth driven and support the youth in understanding how to have positive and healthy relationships with family.
- Support the work of the communities and stakeholders to reduce the disparate impact of the child welfare system on minorities and prevent disproportionate amounts of minority families from entering the child welfare system or out of home placements.

Priority 2(c): Normalcy as the Foundation to a Successful Transition to Adulthood

Normalcy for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system includes creating a supportive network to help youth face life's challenges and a baseline of independent living skills. In addition to skills, youth need permanent families to face the challenges of growing up. Though the majority of youth will eventually live independently, emotional and legal permanency should remain a focus throughout the entire case.

The Committee has focused its efforts on the provisions of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts related to Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). This permanency goal means that the youth will be self-sufficient, including caring for themselves independently and providing for themselves financially, through either employment, supportive services or public financial assistance, and that reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship were attempted, but unsuccessful or not in the youth's best interest. Without a permanent family, these youth need extra support to attain their goals, achieve emotional permanency, and transition to adulthood.

Strategic Action Steps to Support a Successful Transition to Adulthood

Youth Driven and Focused

- All stakeholders should continue to focus on legal and emotional permanency for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system, regardless of the court approved permanency goal.
- All conversations about youth's permanency are youth driven and informed.

Significant and Supportive Connections

- Stakeholders consider the identification of significant supportive connections at each point in the case, including at the start, throughout, and at the close of the case, regardless of the youth's court approved permanency goal.

Intensive and Ongoing Efforts to Attain Permanency

- Intensive and ongoing efforts to return the youth home or place the child with a relative, legal guardian, or adoptive parent should include a youth driven staffing process.
- The youth driven staffing is opportunity focused and takes a team approach. This process will include approximately three staffing meetings. Based on youth feedback, the first meeting should consider all permanency goals, the second should review the progress made toward permanency goals, and in the third meeting the youth and team will make a decision. Each meeting should be held three months apart to allow for intensive ongoing efforts in between.

Transitional Living Plan and Independent Living Skills

- The required transitional living plan is essential to a youth's successful transition and should support the youth's growth into adulthood and independent living, with a heavy focus on life skills. The plan should be youth driven and informed, and reflect the goals, values, and abilities of the youth.
- The transition plan must include planning for life skill attainment based on an assessment to determine gaps in skills.
- Life skill attainment should be tracked as youth move from placement to placement. This tracking can be achieved through a paper form but would ideally be through an web-based application or other electronic/digital means. This will help foster parents identify gaps in independent living skills and support acquiring necessary skills.
- Each family team meeting includes a discussion of an independent living skill, and creates a goal to attain an additional independent living skill.

More information is available in the APPLA Subcommittee Report, available

<https://goo.gl/kzGvka>.

Priority 3: Coordinate Implementation with Other Policy Making Bodies

Implementing the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts is a collaborative effort. The implementation represents a culture change, and stakeholders need time to learn together. As systems work together, the paramount consideration should be the enhancement of normalcy for youth in care and the protection of youth rights.

Strategic Action Steps to Coordinate Implementation with Other Policy Making Bodies

Forum for Best Practices and Implementation

The Strengthening Families Act Committee will continue to serve as a forum for discussion and the identification of innovative solutions to the challenges posed by implementation.

Youth Engagement

The Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that implementation is youth informed, and encourages this through its engagement with youth members. Additionally, the APPLA Subcommittee has held a meeting with the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) to receive feedback from youth who were previously in out of home placements. The APPLA Subcommittee intends to continue to collaborate with the CRP as much as possible to promote youth driven and informed policies.

Strengthening Families Act Advisors/Advocates

The APPLA Subcommittee and the Trafficking Subcommittee will collaborate to identify and recommend best practices for the role of the Strengthening Families Act Advocate/Advisor, pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1311.03\(2\)](#). The groups will work with DHHS-CFS, youth, families, and community partners to make recommendations.

Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force Collaboration

The Trafficking Subcommittee receives regular updates from the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force (NHTTF), in addition to receiving and providing feedback to and from the group. The NHTTF focuses on adult victimization, while the Trafficking Subcommittee focuses on preventing and responding to minor victims of trafficking. The Committee and Subcommittee support the work undertaken by the NHTTF to create and implement pre-screening and screening tools.

Court Implementation

The Committee has created the Court Implementation Subcommittee to collaborate with the Courts in supporting Normalcy and achieving improved outcomes for youth. The group has held one meeting in 2017 and will continue working in partnership with the DHHS-CFS, and the Courts to create recommendations for 2018.

Prevention for Youth with Tribal Affiliation

The Trafficking Subcommittee has identified youth with Tribal affiliation as an important population. The group will pursue partnerships with the tribes and the Indian Child Welfare Act Coalition to support these youth.

Prevention and Education

The Trafficking Subcommittee is exploring the Department of Education as a partner to identify numbers of homeless youth for prevention efforts. The Subcommittee will also explore training for educators and trafficking prevention education for students.

Youth Bill of Rights

The Committee will support the DHHS-CFS as it works to create a Youth Bill of Rights, and to support the Court Improvement Project as it updates its “Know Your Rights” guide for youth. The Committee continues to endorse and recommend inclusion of the rights identified in the report of the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee approved in 2016 which is available at <https://goo.gl/86CKRv>.

Engagement with the Administrative Office of Probation

The Committee receives updates from the Administrative Office of Probation on related initiatives and activities that support youth development. While the Strengthening Families Act does not apply to youth in juvenile justice out-of-home placements because youth remain in the legal custody of their parent and are not state wards, Probation provides information about practices and procedures for handling important aspects of out-of-home placements, such as family engagement, religious preferences, and connection to activities.

Grievance Process

The Grievance Subcommittee has created a comprehensive guide to best practices available at <https://goo.gl/FrQg71>. The group will reconvene to review data and update its recommendations. The Subcommittee works with providers and state agencies to ensure that youth in foster care can enforce their rights.

Normalcy Plans Pursuant to LB225

The Committee will actively review and analyze the Normalcy Plans provided pursuant to LB225 and thoroughly identify areas where stakeholders need support and advocacy to ensure that all youth have as much access to normalcy as possible.

Driver’s Licensure

The Committee will support efforts to connect youth in the child welfare system to driver’s licensing services, car insurance, and automobile access and purchase. If the Nebraska State Legislature approves [LB226](#), the Committee will accept the statutory tasks related to this important topic.

MATRIX SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES

The Strengthening Families Act Committee has developed strategies to promote each of its three priorities:

1. Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts.
2. Promote normalcy as the foundation to
 - a. Prevent trafficking;
 - b. Address disparate impacts on minorities; and
 - c. Support the successful transition to adulthood.
3. Coordinate implementation with other policy making bodies.

This appendix includes the strategies groups by the corresponding priority number, with an indication of whether legislation is needed for the strategy and which goals the strategy supports.

MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE AND FEDERAL STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACTS

The Legislature charged the group with monitoring the implementation of the State and Federal Bill, and the group has made this task its first priority. The Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services (DHHS-CFS), service providers, foster parents and system involved youth provide regular feedback and updates. The Committee understands that implementation requires time and coordination, and strives to serve as a forum for stakeholders to exchange information, provide support, and create innovative solutions to the challenges facing families, children and youth in the child welfare system.

MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
Serve as a collaborative forum to support the implementation of this important Act.	No	1,3
Engage with families and youth to receive their feedback and allow community members to participate actively in the implementation.	No	1,3
Receive updates from the Administrative Office of Probation on related initiatives and activities that support youth development.	No	1,3
Collaborate and provide feedback on regulations required by LB225 and await the promulgation of regulations in accordance with state statute.	No	1,3
Provide in depth review and analysis of the Normalcy Plan reports as required by LB225.	No	1,3
Conduct an analysis of existing grievance processes to determine if additional legislation or policy is necessary. The Committee continues to promote that Youth are regularly notice of their rights. The updated report of the Grievance Subcommittee is available at https://goo.gl/FrQg71 .	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,3
Support the Department of Health and Human Services and the Court Improvement Project as they create the Bill of Rights and Know Your Rights Guide in collaboration with the Youth Citizen Review Panel	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,3
The Community and Family Voice Subcommittee will remain available to serve as a forum for engagement and feedback from the community and families.	No	1,3
The Strengthening Families Act Committee continues to recommend a comprehensive Bill of Rights that includes the rights identified in the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Report from 2016, available at https://goo.gl/86CKRv .	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3

MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
The right to cultural activities should include access to activities that reflect the cultural practices and religious beliefs of the youth and family.	No	1,2,3
Youth need to be regularly notified of their rights in a developmentally and age appropriate manner.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3
Youth need an enforcement mechanism and grievance or complaint process for their rights. See the Grievance Subcommittee's report for additional information on the best practices for grievance systems.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3
Youth and families need more information and awareness of the resources that are available to them.	No	1,2,3

PROMOTE NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO: PREVENTING TRAFFICKING; REDUCING DISPARATE IMPACTS ON MINORITIES; AND THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Normalcy is about allowing youth to reach their full potential by accessing protective factors like extracurricular activities, employment, and healthy friendships and social activities. Foster parents are empowered by the SFA to use the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard, which allows the freedom to make decisions as a caregiver that support normalcy, such as consenting to sleepovers, enrollment in sports activities, and participation in extracurricular activities. This connection to normalcy allows youth to build the foundation of protective factors needed to reach their full potential.

NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO PREVENT TRAFFICKING		
Strategies	Legislation	Goal
Promote a system wide culture change where youth are treated as stakeholders would want their own children treated.	No	2
Normalcy activities should go beyond extracurricular activities, and should include acquiring life skills, such as driving, jobs skills and experience, and social activities such as prom and homecoming dances.	No	1,2,3
Members of the public must be able to identify the trafficking of minors, and understand it as child maltreatment that requires reporting to law enforcement or the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.	No	2
Child placing agency and DHHS-CFS staff must have access to the training they need to identify and support foster parents who can provide placement to this vulnerable population.	No	2,3
The Committee commends the DHHS-CFS for their efforts in establishing training for foster parents related to identifying and responding to trafficking	No	1,2,3
The Nebraska Children’s Commission should work with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administrative Office of Probation, providers, families, and other stakeholders to make recommendations on a treatment level out-of-home placement for youth who have been victims of trafficking.	No	2,3
DHHS-CFS and the Administrative Office of Probation should establish processes for the youth to work with caseworker or probation officer, foster parents, biological parents (if applicable), Strengthening Families Act Advisor/Advocate (if youth is child welfare involved) to create a plan to prevent youth from going missing from care by allowing them to designate a “cooling off” area.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3

<p>NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO PREVENT TRAFFICKING</p>		
Strategies	Legislation	Goal
Professionals support youth in out-of-home placements by allowing them to designate a code word that signals a need to have a confidential conversation outside of the placement.	No	1,2,3
Design or designate a centralized procedure to receive reports and coordinate the response to trafficked minors.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3
DHHS-CFS should respond to reports of trafficking with an investigation within 24 hours, whether or not the trafficker is a third party perpetrator or a caregiver, and whether or not the trafficker is living in the home.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3

NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO ADDRESS DISPARATE IMPACTS ON MINORITIES

The Normalcy Subcommittee has recognized Normalcy as a powerful tool to connect minority youth with their communities and families. The Nebraska State Legislature has recognized the importance of race, culture, and identify for children in out-of-home care, as per [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4702](#). A larger percentage of youth in welfare placements are minorities compared to the overall percentage population of minorities. Minority youth and families have different experiences of the child welfare system, and the Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that normalcy is used as a tool to help all families and youth connect to their culture.

NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO ADDRESS DISPARATE IMPACTS ON MINORITIES		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
Normalcy activities and family contact should be used to attain the goals set forth in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and foster connections for youth with tribal affiliation to their families and tribes as much as possible.	No	2
Minority youth deserve to have their holistic identities understood and respected.	No	2
The diversity of family structures of youth who are minority, refugee/immigrant or youth with tribal affiliations should be recognized. Every culture has a distinct concept of who is included in a family, and may be broader than just immediate blood relations.	Need for Legislation Under Review	2
Support the work of the communities and stakeholders to reduce the disparate impact of the child welfare system on minorities and prevent disproportionate amounts of minority families from entering the child welfare system or out of home placements.	Need for Legislation Under Review	2

NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

The Committee has focused its efforts on the provisions of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts related to Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). This permanency goal means that the youth will be self-sufficient, including caring for themselves independently and providing for themselves financially, through either employment or supportive services or public financial assistance, and that reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship were attempted, but unsuccessful or not in the youth's best interest. Without a permanent family, these youth need extra support to attain their goals.

NORMALCY AS THE FOUNDATION TO A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
All stakeholders should continue to focus on legal and emotional permanency for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system, regardless of the court approved permanency goal.	No	1,2,3
All conversations about youth's permanency are youth driven and informed.	No	2
Stakeholders consider the identification of significant supportive connections at each point in the case, including at the start, throughout, and at the close of the case, regardless of the youth's court approved permanency goal.	No	2
Intensive and ongoing efforts to return the youth home or place the child with a relative, legal guardian, or adoptive parent should include a youth driven staffing process.	No	2
The staffing is youth driven, youth informed; opportunity focused and takes a team approach. This process will include approximately three staffing meetings. Based on youth feedback, the first meeting should consider all permanency goals, the second should review the progress made toward permanency goals, and in the third meeting the youth and team will make a decision.	No	2
The required transitional living plan is essential to the youth's success and should support the youth's growth into adulthood and independent living, with a heavy focus on life skills.	No	2
The transition plan must include planning for life skill attainment, and an assessment to determine gaps in skills.	No	2
Life skill attainment should be tracked as youth move from placement to placement. This tracking can be achieved through a paper form but would ideally be through a web-based application or other electronic/digital means.	No	2
Each family team meeting includes a discussion of an independent living skill, and creates a goal to attain an additional independent living skill.	No	2

COORDINATE IMPLEMENTATION WITH OTHER POLICY MAKING BODIES

Implementing the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts is a collaborative effort. The implementation represents a culture change, and stakeholders need time to learn together. As systems work together, the paramount consideration should be the enhancement of normalcy for youth in care and the protection of youth rights.

COORDINATE IMPLEMENTATION WITH OTHER POLICY MAKING BODIES		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
The Strengthening Families Act Committee will continue to serve as a forum for discussion and the identification of innovative solutions to the challenges posed by implementation.	No	1,2,3
The Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that implementation is youth informed, and encourages this through this engagement with youth members.	No	1,2,3
The APPLA Subcommittee and the Trafficking Subcommittee will collaborate to identify and recommend best practices for the role of the Strengthening Families Act Advocate/Advisor, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1311.03(2) . The groups will work with DHHS-CFS, youth, families, and community partners to make recommendations.	No	1,2,3
The Committee and Subcommittee support the work undertaken by the NHITF to create and implement pre-screening and screening tools.	No	1,2,3
The Committee has created the Court Implementation Subcommittee to collaborate with the Courts in supporting Normalcy and achieving improved outcomes for youth.	No	1,2,3
The Trafficking Subcommittee has identified youth with Tribal affiliation as an important population. The group will pursue partnerships with the tribes and the Indian Child Welfare Act Coalition to support these youth.	No	1,2,3
The Trafficking Subcommittee is exploring the Department of Education as a partner to identify numbers of homeless youth for prevention efforts. The Subcommittee will also explore training for educators and trafficking prevention education for students.	No	1,2,3
The Committee will support the DHHS-CFS as it works to create a Youth Bill of Rights, and to support the Court Improvement Program as it updates its “Know Your Rights” guide for youth.	Need for Legislation Under Review	1,2,3

COORDINATE IMPLEMENTATION WITH OTHER POLICY MAKING BODIES		
Strategy	Legislation	Goal
The Grievance Subcommittee has created a comprehensive guide to best practices available at https://goo.gl/FrQg71 . The group will reconvene to review data and update its recommendations. The Subcommittee works with providers and state agencies to ensure that youth in foster care can enforce their rights.	No	1,2,3
The Committee will actively review and analyze the Normalcy Plans provided pursuant to LB225 and thoroughly identify areas where stakeholders need support and advocacy to ensure that all youth have as much access to normalcy as possible.	No	1,2,3
The Committee will support efforts to connect youth in the child welfare system to driver’s licensing services, car insurance, and automobile access and purchase. If the Nebraska State Legislature approves LB226, the Committee will accept the statutory tasks related to this important topic.	Yes	1,2,3

Appendix B

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Vacant	Voting	,	parent who has experience with the Foster Care System
Vacant	Voting	,	representative of a child care institution
Payne Ackerman	Voting	Former Foster Youth , Project Everlast	young adult currently or previously in foster care
Erin Bader	Voting	Director of Permanency and Well Being Programs , Lutheran Family Services	professional who has relevant practical experience
Cassy Blakely	Voting	Assistant VP of Youth Policy , Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	professional who has relevant practical experience
Ashley Brown	Voting	Program Director , Nebraska KVC	representative from a child welfare service agency
Anna Brummer	Voting	Foster Parent Representative , Foster Parent Representative	current or former foster parent
Nathan Collier	Voting	Former Foster Youth , Former Foster Youth	young adult currently or previously in foster care
Heather Colton	Voting	Associate Attorney/Guardian Ad Litem , Pollak & Ball, LLC	Guardian Ad Litem
Vernon Davis (Co-Chair)	Voting	Young Adult Previously in Foster Care , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	young adult currently or previously in foster care
Jude Dean	Voting	Foster Parent Representative , CEDARS	current or former foster parent
Patricia Frost	Voting	Education Specialist II , Nebraska Department of Education	representative of the Department of Education (non-statutory)
Kim Hawekotte	Voting	Executive Director , Foster Care Review Office	Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office
Sarah Helvey (Co-Chair)	Voting	Child Welfare Program Director / Staff Attorney , Nebraska Appleseed	representative from a child welfare advocacy organization
Nikki Novak	Voting	Foster Family Services Supervisor , Boys Town	representative from a child welfare service agency
Stacy Scholten	Voting	Service Delivery Administrator , DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services	representative of the Executive Branch of Government
Nicole Seymour	Voting	Coordinated Response Program Manager , Nebraska Families Collaborative	representative from a child welfare service agency (NFC)

Appendix B

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Deb Shuck	Voting	Central Service Navigator for the Older Youth System of Care, CAPWN	representative from an agency providing independent living services
Lisa Story	Voting	Foster Parent Representative, Foster Parent Representative	current or former foster parent
Juliet Summers	Voting	Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice, Voices for Children in Nebraska	representative from a child welfare advocacy organization
A'Jamal Byndon	Resource	Administrator, Community Initiative Consultant, Nebraska Families Collaborative	representative from a child welfare service agency
Jim Bennett	Ex-Officio	Director of Placement, Supervision Services, Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division	representative from the Juvenile Probation System
Timoree Klingler	Ex-Officio	Legislative Aide to Senator Sara Howard, Nebraska Legislative Council	representative of the Legislative Branch of Government
Deb VanDyke-Ries	Ex-Officio	Director, Nebraska Court Improvement Project	representative of the Judicial Branch of Government