

**Transition Advisory Committee
Meeting 25
December 9, 2025, 10:00am – 3pm CT
Public attendee link:**

<https://illinois.webex.com/weblink/register/r01761db53b0a334844063fbe83200983>

In attendance:

Transition Advisory Committee (TAC) members: Katie Cobb (Peoria Public School District), Johnna Darragh-Ernst (Heartland Community College), LaKeesha James-Smith (Parent), Kesha Harris (Parent - virtual), Zena Madison (Birth to Five Illinois), Marcy Mendenhall (SAL Family & Community Services), Janice Moenster (Brightpoint), Bela Moté (Chair, Carole Robertson Center), Robin Steans (Advance Illinois), Angel Powell-Muldrow (Early Childhood Center Principal), Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (Latino Policy Forum - virtual), Sarah Ziemba (Shine Therapy Services)

State Agency Members and Consultants: Shontee Blankenship (IDEC), Maya Portillo (IDEC), Jessica Morris (IDEC), Patricia Rooney (IDEC), Paige Greenwood (IDEC), Megan Bock (Afton Partners), Aressa Coley (Afton Partners), Siri Smillie (Afton Partners - virtual), Ellen Johnson (Afton Partners), Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners), Kaitlyn McGovern (Afton Partners), Erin Arango-Escalante (All Children Thrive - virtual), Elliot Regenstein (Foresight Law & Policy)

Members of the public (virtual and in-person): 44

Minutes

1. Meeting Commencement & Greetings – Trish Rooney (15 minutes)

Trish Rooney brought the meeting to a start by greeting virtual and in-person participants. She introduced herself as the Chief Family and Community Systems Officer at IDEC and expressed how grateful she was to step into a leadership role on behalf of IDEC and work more closely with TAC members as they go into Year 3 of their work. She reiterated that Ann Whalen will be taking a step back from TAC to focus on IDEC operational readiness by July 2026. Trish gave a brief overview of her background and shared how critical the TAC has been in informing multiple aspects of the Transition.

She gave an overview of the TAC's charge, previewed the meeting goals, the agenda, and several housekeeping notes for the virtual and in-person meeting.

TAC Charge: The TAC will seek and help the state make meaning of stakeholder input in preparation for the transition, with a particular emphasis on understanding families' goals and needs from a comprehensive ECE system for Illinois children.

Meeting Goals

- Continue building community to strengthen relationships among TAC members.
- Celebrate and reflect on TAC's contributions over the past year
- Identify TAC's strategic priorities and revised processes for 2026
- Learn about and provide feedback on Transition Workstreams: Advisory, Program Standards & Alignment, and Licensing.

Agenda

- Welcome
- Community Builder
- IDEC updates
- TAC in review
- Workstream deep dive: *Advisory Workgroup*
- **Lunch**
- Community Builder
- Workstream Deep Dive: *Program Standards Alignment*
- Workstream Deep Dive: *Licensing*
- **Break**
- TAC Year 3 – Looking Ahead
- Closing

2. Welcome & Community Builder – Bela Moté, Kristen Garcia (20 minutes)

Bela Moté (TAC Chair) called on TAC members to read the TAC community agreements, TAC Equity Framework, and the family spotlight quote to ground the meeting in a family perspective: “We should have more steady positions for parent leadership, not just a stipend to cover the cost of participating... I want parents to have a parent advocate or liaison for every program and site. Parents don’t always know what parent policies are. If we could teach parents more about how to propose their ideas at the macro and micro levels, to their teachers and site directors, hopefully it will lead other parents to where it led me. Like what it did for me to finish my education and pursue a career where I get to serve.” – Parent/Caregiver, Cook County

Kristen Garcia (Afton Partners) led in-person TAC members and members of the public through a community building activity to get participants moving and connected as a group before diving into the meeting content. For 15 minutes, TAC members went around the room and had 3 rounds of 5-minute conversations with each other that aimed to discuss a mentor who made a positive impact, a positive change that gives them hope, and a strength they carry from their family or community.

During the large group share-out, Katie Cobb (TAC member) described feeling closer to her fellow TAC members and enjoying the discussions she had. A member of the public shared they learned how resilient and strong her colleague is and shared appreciation for working alongside her.

3. Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) Updates – Maya Portillo (15 minutes)

Maya Portillo (IDEC) began this section with staffing updates at IDEC, introducing a new staff member, Shannon Tesio who serves as the Director of Fiscal Services, bringing the number of IDEC staff to a total of 26 as of December 9th.

Maya also gave an update on the 2025 PDG B-5 Systems Building Grant application. The PDG Program Priorities align well to Illinois’ current work. The Illinois Application included initiatives underway with the intent to go faster and further in 2026. The funding amount for this grant is \$222,000,000 total. The maximum award ranges from \$500,000 to \$15M. Illinois applied for \$14,906,142 with an opportunity for

less than \$3M more. It is a competitive grant that is available to 45 states to apply, and they anticipate 25 awards.

IDEC applied for this grant with four main project strategies in mind:

- Strategy 1: IDEC is unifying oversight of key programs
- Strategy 2: IL will redesign its approach to EC Funding
- Strategy 3: IL will align operations across EC programs to improve administrative efficiency
- Strategy 4: IL will use tech to provide a seamless experience for families, and to streamline verification of workforce credentials (IDEC 360)
 - User Portals
 - Data and Analytics Hub

The timeline for this grant is 1 year, from December 31, 2025 to December 31, 2026. They anticipate hearing if they were awarded by the end of the calendar year. Maya thanked everyone at the meeting who helped put Illinois' application together. The Redacted Application is posted on the IDEC website here: <https://idec.illinois.gov/goecd/pdg-b-5.html>

Maya gave federal updates, sharing the last ELC-Ad Hoc meeting of 2025 was held last week. They shared information on:

- Supporting Illinois Families Toolkit that IDEC created aimed for agencies and organizations supporting child care providers on Know Your Rights information, posted on IDEC website.
- Current Attendance Exemptions for CCAP communications that went out to CCAP child care providers regarding attendance waivers.

The ELC-Ad Hoc meetings will resume in January. For the meeting date and more information related to these updates, please visit the [IDEC website](#).

4. TAC Year in Review – Aressa Coley, Rochelle Golliday, Katie Cobb (25 minutes)

Aressa Coley (Afton Partners) shared what an incredible journey together the TAC has been on over the last two years. She invited Rochelle Golliday (TAC member) and Katie Cobb (TAC member) to present on TAC Year 1 and TAC Year 2 activities and accomplishments.

TAC Year 1 (December 2023 – December 2024)

Rochelle shared that Year 1 prioritized relationship-building, shared purpose, and internal structures for reviewing stakeholder input. Throughout the year, the TAC moved from grounding and meaning-making to deep analysis of input centered around the question, “what do families need in a new system?”

During Year 2, the TAC conducted the following activities:

- Build norms, common knowledge, and language
- Get to know the transition consultants and their roles
- Establish a shared definition of equity and family-centered thinking
- Deep dive into family engagement findings and meaning making
- Unpack ongoing feedback and findings from transition areas and Regional Listening Sessions

TAC Year 2 (January – December 2025)

Katie shared that Year 2 focused on sharpening the TAC's role within the broader transition and making connections across engagement and design spaces. Members deepened meaning-making, reflected on emerging insights, and informed proposals, ensuring the work remained equitable and family-centered.

During Year 2, the TAC conducted the following activities:

- Discuss ways to enhance meaning-making processes
- Strengthen connections between existing transition engagement and design spaces
- Connect the dots across workgroups and TAC
- Reflect on emerging insights from family service workgroups
- Inform a data infrastructure vision at IDEC
- Learn about emerging transition redesign projects
- Continue informing the transition redesign workstreams' processes and scope and emerging recommendations
- Share insights to ensure they equitably center families and providers

Aressa gave an overview of the various ways TAC plays an essential role in informing the Transition's work, consisting of serving as an advisory function to inform the process of system redesign, making connections across priority workstreams, reviewing recommendations to ensure new proposals equitably center children and families. She emphasized that TAC provides a bird's eye view across all redesign efforts and they elevate critical questions that surface potential unintended consequences for children, providers, and families. IDEC also relies on the individual expertise of all TAC members through formal and informal feedback channels such as 1:1 conversations, small group discussions, and TAC member participation in transition workgroups.

Across Transition workgroups, TAC serves an important role at lifting current state of pain points in family services while guiding the state towards delivering on what families and providers need from the system.

Specifically, in 2025, TAC has informed Transition redesign workstreams to ensure they equitably centered families and providers, including:

- Processing feedback from over 9,000 stakeholder engagement touchpoints through an equity and family-centered lens
- Informing the design of the birth to three co-design sprint based on community input and TAC member expertise
- Providing feedback on ChiByDesign's Service Blueprint process
- Informing the design of the licensing co-design sprint based on community input and TAC member expertise
- Providing feedback on the development of Family Portraits
- Providing feedback on the funding design workgroup's scope and objectives and making meaning of emerging insights from workgroup discussions
- Providing feedback on the Program Standard Alignment workstream's scope and objectives
- Highlighting opportunities to enhance equitable access for families and providers through data and technology and providing feedback on ECIDS legislation (enacted in 2025)

Finally, the TAC has also informed the state's processes and systems to ensure they equitably center families and providers through:

- Better leveraging and making meaning of public input
- Thinking about when to gather broad vs. focused feedback
- Identifying various entry points for gathering family and provider input
- Establishing equitable processes for making meaning of family input (i.e., family portraits, equity framework)
- Piloting ideas and strategies

Bela led the group in a reflection activity to answer the following questions:

- *Which moment during your time together has stood out as the most meaningful?*
- *What has been your favorite contribution the TAC has made so far?*
- *How have you contributed to the TAC's growth during Year 1 and Year 2?*

TAC members reflected on these questions and wrote their responses down on Post-It notes and placed on flipcharts. Once finished, Aressa and Kaitlyn McGovern (Afton Partners) summarized key themes in responses for each question.

Which moment during your time together has stood out as the most meaningful?

TAC members appreciate that this group is made up of diverse perspectives of parents, providers, advocates, intermediaries, and system enablers. They appreciate the deep dives into specific topics and opportunities get into detail at each meeting. They also enjoy the format of breaking out into small groups and sharing out in large groups. They highlighted the creation of the TAC Equity Framework as a core infrastructure to their work and across the work of the Transition, and the achievements in supporting legislation that created the new agency. They also enjoyed the in-person meetings and the chance to strengthen relationships across the committee.

What has been your favorite contribution the TAC has made so far?

TAC members have enjoyed lifting parent voices through their participation on TAC. They have also appreciated the research-driven approach of the transition and opportunities for in-person meetings to get more specific and concrete in discussions. They've also enjoyed contributing to listening sessions and hearing about licensing work related to the Transition. They also look forward to seeing their work come to fruition through the parent portal, streamlined background checks, and ECIDS. They've also enjoyed hosting regional listening sessions to help IDEC get broad engagement on topics related to pain points of the current state.

How have you contributed to the TAC's growth during Year 1 and Year 2?

Many TAC members commented that they've provided feedback to specific workstreams and tools, such as family portraits. They've also had a lot of email recommendations and 1:1s with stakeholders across the field and have elevated and asked hard questions throughout the process. They highlighted their ability to put families first and have explicit discussions on family and systems, as well as providing their individual expertise in conversations.

5. Break – 5 minutes

6. Workstream Deep Dive: Advisory Workgroup – Elliot Regenstein (40 minutes)

Elliot Regenstein (Foresight Law + Policy) gave an update on the work of the Advisory Groups Planning Workgroup. He last came to the TAC in early 2025 and did a brief preview of their scope and shared he is excited to be at TAC to do a deeper dive on their progress to date. The overview of his presentation included: who the advisory groups workgroup is, where they are in their process, what they've agreed on so far, and their next steps. The following is a high-level summary of key components of Elliot's presentation. The full December TAC presentation is posted on the [IDEC website](#).

The main charge for this workgroup is to advise on the advisory function for IDEC, grounded in the following key questions: *how will this advisory function be structured and organized? What are the key functions beneath it to make this possible?*

An advisory body is written in the legislature as a requirement for IDEC by July 1, 2026. As the workgroup thinks through any legislative changes, the ELC will serve this role upon the agency's first day. The workgroup's approach to building final recommendations includes:

1. Develop draft recommendations for the desired end state: what do we want the advisory function at IDEC to look like?
2. Analyzing the current state
3. Discuss how to get from current state to desired end state

Proposed Desired Future State

The draft proposal for the desired end state includes the following sections:

- Measuring impact
- Engaging the entire advisory ecosystem
- Direct engagement
- Advisory groups: What and who
- Advisory groups: How (including family and community engagement)

Elliot gave a deeper presentation on each of the sections included in the Draft Plan. This included the workgroup's recommendations to engage the full range of current advisory bodies, describing several instances for different advisory groups with overlapping responsibilities. He went on to describe the notion of IDEC having an "air traffic control" function to ensure coordination among different advisory groups. He also described that there would need to be a balance of having standing advisory bodies with short-term task-oriented groups. There are benefits to having task-oriented groups, but too many can be burdensome.

- Robin Stains (TAC member): On the opposite side, when you are very task oriented, you don't get the big picture thinking. Want to ensure this is also part of balancing act.
 - Elliot: With broad umbrella groups- you get to see the big picture, but for many people at the table, there are only small parts of the agenda where if you speak to them, there's limited focus. The people at the table will be more engaged. These are all balances that there's no perfect answers.

He also described essential requirements for authentically and meaningfully engaging groups who are not typically at the table, such as families and providers.

Several TAC members asked questions throughout the presentation:

- Marcy Mendenhall (TAC member): Are you using the Head Start Act as an example or why is Head Start (HS) included in the Advisory Groups: State Advisory Council section?
 - Elliot: The Head Start Act requires the state to have this council. Part of the state statutory charge to IDEC is having a lead advisory council that looks like what federal requirements require us to have. We know there has to be something, and federal law defines some minimal requirements for membership in this group and topics it must address, but the workgroup can add to those recommendations.
- Marcy: Right now, funding goes from federal to local and bypasses the state. Confused why we are putting the state in now as a requirement.
 - Elliot: The state's advisory council itself is not funded by the federal government. It's a federal law that requires all states to have an advisory council to meet these criteria. That requirement was part of reauthorization in 2008. By the time federal law was passed, Illinois already met its requirements. By state law, they created the Early Learning Council (ELC) in 2003. As part of advisory workgroup function, we want to ensure what we come up with as a plan complies with the federal law. We won't get money to implement it but need to make sure we're in compliance.
- Bela: Just so I'm clear, regardless of whether the state directly receives HS funding, they still have to be compliant with HS?
 - Elliot: Correct. Technically, there is no enforcement mechanism with that, and several states don't have one. But we are trying to remain in good standing, and this is also a requirement of other federal grants. Regardless of federal law, we also have state law that requires us to have a council of this type.
 - Trish: We talk about the Child Care Advisory Council under the Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) Grant. We also use advisory – Head Start as the umbrella and CCDF is associated with that.
 - Elliot: It's not super well-designed at the federal level. It's included in the Head Start Act to inspire state systems building, and to try to build ties with the HS community and state PreK, which was growing rapidly at that time, in addition to child care. Illinois was ahead of the curve at thinking about this.
- Bela: Is governance different than funding?
 - Elliot: Yes.
- Marcy: how do we ensure the diversity on the AC?
 - Elliot: We've articulated this as a guiding principle, but it is not flushed out.

After the presentation, TAC members and members of the public broke out into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What resonates with you?
- Is there anything missing?
 - Any details you want to flesh out?
- Any points of connection that our workgroup should be aware of?

After small groups, facilitators for each group shared high level takeaways:

- Group 1: appreciated honest acknowledgement that the system is not working; value the emphasis placed on two-way communication and real-time responsiveness. Felt that clarifying relationships among advisory councils and those outside of IDEC's authority was a critical missing piece.
- Group 2: want to see IDEC leverage existing advisory bodies to avoid rebuilding from scratch; appreciated the acknowledgement of diversity across communities and roles. There's a need for clear pathways showing where feedback travels and how decisions get made. There are strong existing coalitions that can be leveraged.
- Group 3: they appreciated the vision of an organized, coherent system and the idea of air-traffic control to solve issues TAC members have seen firsthand. They highlighted that staffing of this advisory function will be essential to have it work well and the way it is intended. This includes compensation for those who are part of the advisory group, especially for families and workforce members.
- Group 4 (virtual): Emphasized the need to think outside the box to include parent voice. Parents are busy and likely do not have capacity to sit on an advisory council for X amount of meetings. This could be a 5 question survey as a way to get family voice at various times throughout the year, especially with vulnerable populations.

7. Lunch (45 minutes)

8. Community Builder – Ellen Johnson (15 minutes)

Ellen Johnson (Afton Partners) led the group through a community builder. TAC members were asked to pick a sticker, from a wide selection, that metaphorically represents what they want to bring to Year 3 of TAC. As an example, they could choose a tree because they want to come in stable, grounded with deep roots in their role/perspective.

Participants shared the stickers they chose and why, overall describing how they are coming into Year 3 grateful and eager to help IDEC work towards their equity goals of a unified department to improve the experiences of children and families.

9. Workstream Deep Dive: Program Standards Alignment Updates – Megan Bock (30 minutes)

Megan Bock (Afton Partners) gave an overview on the Program Standards Alignment Workgroup. This presentation aimed to:

1. Review the goals and outputs of the Program Standards workstream
2. Share initial takeaways from one-on-one conversations
3. Gather input from TAC

The following is a high-level summary of key components of the presentation. The full presentation is included in the TAC deck, posted on the [IDEC website](#).

As Megan presented on how the workgroup's process will review program standards in early care and education, home visiting, and early intervention, Bela noted that under home visiting, Early Head Start was explicitly mentioned, but Head Start also has home visiting. She also flagged the need to include NAFCC for FCC standards under early care and education.

Megan shared that a Program Standards Workgroup meeting will be held next week and is open to the public. She encouraged all participants to attend if they are interested.

TAC members and other participants also engaged in a large group discussion around the initial takeaways from the Program Standards Workgroup and the workgroup's intersection with the Funding Design Workgroup:

- Jessica Morris (IDEC): It was so beneficial to do trauma-informed trainings with school districts, caregivers, and families. I love that this is getting emphasis.
- Janice Moenster (TAC member): This also translates into HV caseloads. Family needs are more complex—you spend more time on basic needs rather than parenting, growth, and development. It's a balancing act.
- Marcy: Are program standards inclusive of mental health and quality, or exclusive?
 - Megan: What we should narrow in on is ratios being the primary element included across program standards. Trauma-informed care is an inclusive element but hasn't been discussed as something necessary on its own, though it's been highlighted in conversations.
- Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (TAC member): Wondering if there's been thought about updating standards for different priority populations—thinking about MLLs. Different programs may have different standards. We've heard a ton from families and providers about the importance of this group. LPF is thinking about recommendations. Is there a plan for thinking about that in this comprehensive view on standards?
 - Megan: Lots of room to dive more deeply into this—want to add Rebecca to the list of 1:1 conversations the Program Standards Workgroup aims to have.
 - Megan: In other groups, we've been paying attention to these needs. We've had deep-dive conversations on the needs of MLLs in funding design. That has implications for program standards and vice versa. It's not just a conversation about cost; these needs require additional resources. FSWG is providing insight into what families want and need, including the need for MLL services—another avenue for feedback.
 - Aressa: Connecting Rebecca's question with Marcy's—this is inclusive of MLLs and children with special needs. It has to be. What is necessary for children with disabilities is different from what is necessary for MLLs. Part of this is taking a comprehensive view to see where we need to enhance what is written in the form of recommendations and how all program standards align. The intention is to serve all children, especially children with disabilities and MLLs across the state.
- Rebecca: Personally worried—reconsidering HS standards under the current administration takes away from forward-thinking around MLLs. Grateful to be in a state that centers these kids and the providers
- Marcy: Trying to get to the end state. Will this work with Maya and funding design to have a dollar amount per child? Will this lead to the informed decision that in Illinois, this is how much ECE costs for infants/toddlers, 2-year-olds, preschoolers? Is that the ultimate design?
 - Maya: In funding design, we are articulating a funding adequacy target. It takes multiple forms—child care, HV, FFN care. We are reviewing past cost modeling and considering what we need for a comprehensive model, especially for children with disabilities and MLLs. This work is complementary to program standards. Funding is ahead in timing. At

the end of the program standards process, we can articulate recommendations on where further alignment is needed, and funding alignment will continue to iterate based on that.

- Marcy: Is the end state going to be a cost per child? What will that look like from a provider perspective, as the throughline for implementing high-quality experiences for children and families? Is it only cost per child?
 - Maya: Historically, that's how the state has thought about it. But we've also thought through the lens of SSWG about per-classroom costs. We've continued refining thinking about per-child, per-classroom, and per-program costs. We've begun articulating this in funding—more to come.
- Jessica: Are you also thinking about reporting ambitions? We have strong data analytics capability for early childhood in the state. Think through what reports we want internally and what reports we can give providers. Will you have good inputs for us?
 - Maya: Yes. Working with Christina on what data is needed to reestablish a strong, robust system. The workgroup is launching next Thursday from 4:30–6.
- Bela: This is great—hope this links to the monitoring piece. There is an administrative burden with different funding streams and their monitoring requirements. This is essential to get to the next level of quality and impact, especially for FCC infrastructure. Think through the realistic on-the-ground lift when creating a monitoring site visit. Do you need alignment of standards first, or does this go hand in hand? You can have hundreds of standards, but you need to monitor them—and consider what that means for programs, IDEC, and to what end. What are we trying to accomplish with standards?
 - Megan: The challenge is the evidence required to meet the standards.
 - Siri Smillie (Afton Partners): Clarification—when thinking about cross-mapping standards, part of it is determining what is required. One primary category we're considering is the support needed for MLLs and children with disabilities. This includes looking at requirements across HS, ECBG, etc., and best practices. Erin has shared the WIDA standards and best practices for MLLs, helping us understand what this looks like across programs—where discrepancies exist and what a continuum of best practices might look like. First requires mapping with the workgroup and stakeholders, identifying what we're aiming for, and noting alignment opportunities.
- Sarah: The standards I'm most familiar with are 407 (licensing). It feels like this is a different conversation from funding, it feels like a health and development conversation. There's so much expertise around systems, but this may need a different group focused on physical learning environments that are developmentally potent. This is one of the areas where we are most outdated. Do we need educators in a separate group to focus on this?
 - Megan: Workgroup perspectives—there are platforms to discuss these issues, and more subcommittees to come. This is something to note as a potential subcommittee topic.
- Janice: The CCR&Rs are designed to provide that support. But it goes back to funding adequacy—our system is not funded with the people and the resources needed to do that work. What keeps getting excluded is child welfare involvement. Screening and ratios apply in the child welfare environment. Research shows the majority of children involved are under age 3—flagging for additional perspective.

- Johnna: Appreciated earlier comments on inclusion and the broad range of developmental needs. In absence of specific standards, I'm appreciative of the expertise and the need to bring in family voices. Thinking about intentionality. Wanted to note that comment and map it to the intention around developmental needs.
 - Megan: There is an intention to look at the developmental piece and what it means to operationalize work in different programs.
- Sarah: I've been an EI provider for 25 years. I didn't see ELDS until a year ago. Was asked to mentor doulas and HVs and have been digging into ELDS to relate them to development. This is an opportunity to combine systems under the same goals and be a team for a child. EI should be included in the standards as part of the team. If we put these pieces together, EI providers and other providers can better coordinate. I've never made a referral to HV; if we were aligned under similar goals, it would come more naturally. Families need a team. It's a missed opportunity. The standards are appropriate, but why have I never seen them or been made aware?
 - Megan: Welcomed everyone to join the workgroup.
 - Trish: This is the purpose of coming into one agency. There's a lack of awareness that the learning standards can be the foundation or baseline. When you think of scaffolding—licensing, then developmentally appropriate practice, then standards—how do you fund and support each step?
- Jessica: Is there going to be a place to implement these standards and make them more visible in the provider portal or for families? Is there a way to leverage a unified portal to help providers make referrals and tee up wraparound supports for kids? Might be worth thinking through how to leverage tech to increase awareness and support that wraparound mentality.
- Member of the public: At Heartland Community College, we were very focused on IELDS. Are you leveraging folks entering the ECE workforce? We talk about families being at the table, but higher ed is an opportunity to bring updated research.
 - Megan: There is broad representation on the workgroup, which is open to the public. Anyone not involved can be invited to join meetings and participate.
 - Maya: We have the project director on workforce who used to lead the ECACE consortium. We try to ensure workgroup composition reflects different position types across the field. We are actively working to be inclusive of higher education beyond the consortium.

10. Workstream Deep Dive: Licensing Updates – Shontee Blankenship (30 minutes)

Shontee Blankenship (IDEC) provided an update on ongoing work IDEC and Civic Consulting Alliance are doing on reimagining child care licensing, background checks, and exemptions in Illinois. The following is a brief summary of key components of the presentation and the discussions that followed. The full presentation is included in the TAC deck, posted on the [IDEC website](#).

Shontee shared the key goal of the project, which is to design and advance a comprehensive, equitable model for child care licensing that is safe for families, simpler for providers, and anchored in a continuum of quality. She then gave an overview of the project background and the consultants, Civic Consulting Alliance and DLA Piper who have partnered with IDEC to tackle this work.

She gave a deeper dive on details, progress, and learnings related to background checks and exemptions.

On background checks, Shontee gave an overview of the desired future state, where background checks and fingerprints are tied to an individual rather than a provider and the burden of adjudicating waivable offenses is shifted to the state from providers. Shontee described the changes in process for tying the fingerprint data from provider to the individual as they will be able to transfer more easily among providers. Pending legislation, individuals may be able to get a background check done before applying for a job, allowing for faster hiring processes. She also described how IDEC is working to adjudicate all waivable offenses and issue clearances to work in child care. Providers will only see whether someone is eligible or ineligible for employment. After the presentation, TAC members and members of the public participated in a large group discussion.

- Johnna Darragh-Ernst (TAC member) asked why background checks were with providers and not the system.
 - Shontee: It's been that way for a long time. With the provider, we're able to find out what that person's prints are. With DCFS, they have provider IDs and put those prints under provider IDs. Issues that come up go straight to the provider, rather than dealing with the individual separate from the provider.
 - Shontee: Nothing is set in stone. What would it look like to tie prints to the individual instead of the provider? Rather than sending out BCU notices where there's history on a person's criminal background, right now we send it to the provider, the provider looks at it, makes recommendations, sends it to the rep—there are a lot of different steps. You're waiting when you need to hire. Rather than going through that process, IDEC will be the one to adjudicate waivable offenses. Not talking about barred offenses—those cannot be waived. DCFS adjudicates waivable offenses for the owner of a facility; they do this for owners and directors. But for employees, the provider is responsible for that.
- Jessica Morris (IDEC): With that adjudication, are we looking at ways to automate assessment on waivers and categorize those?
 - Shontee: Considering a panel within the Background Check Unit. Still have to follow laws related to what you need to consider for waivable offenses. That's not something a computer can do—you need a team of people to review those cases and make decisions.
- Jessica: Is there a cost aspect? The state pays for all background checks, but if you're not working somewhere and want to get a background check...?
 - Shontee: We're looking at law and ISP requirements related to that. There are many requirements—checks must be tied to child care. There still has to be some connection to child care; we're looking at those links.
- Bela: Are we going to be able to dive in, or do you have key questions to ask us?
- Jessica: For background checks—DCFS has a background check portal now. A person can get a unique identity. If someone wants to work for various providers, where do they register to become part of the workforce?
 - Shontee: Workforce is more the education piece; this is the background check piece. They will look at a pool of people who are cleared under the umbrella. This will be part of the next round of enhancements next year.

- Marcy: Thank you, this is awesome.
 - Shontee: It's a lot of work but necessary, because it's not as simple as we thought. We don't want to rush and sacrifice quality.
- Clarifying question (member of the public): When talking about this portal, you don't want to call it a "workforce" portal when it holds background information. Because the portal will hold everyone's background—regardless of whether you passed or not—it will always have your information?
 - Shontee: We're still figuring that out. If "workforce" means working in child care, we're looking at tying all of this together. There are several portals you can look at specifically, and background checks are another portal related to hiring for a facility.
 - Shontee: This is the reimagining piece I'm excited about.
- Marcy: It's a burden on providers who are waiting.
 - Shontee: That's the automated piece.
 - Marcy: If they don't get clearance in time, they leave the field entirely.
- Robin: Realistically, what's the timeframe to pull this off?
 - Shontee: We can't do anything until we have legislative authority to do background checks. That's what we're trying to get for FY25 spring legislative session—permission to do background checks.
- Robin: Presumably you get that; that won't be a barrier. Realistically, how long to build the infrastructure?
 - Shontee: We've looked at other states that have done this. Based on their process, it's not as clear-cut as we hoped. Other states took different approaches that we may not take. We're listening to avoid mistakes and lessons learned. It will be system heavy. That's why Jessica (CIO) is here—there are major systems components. The background check phase won't come from...
 - Jessica: We're doing discovery now until the end of the year. The other timeline involves the PDG grant—if we get that, the big work is setting up the whole data infrastructure, which is massive. It's a \$4M grant application to build the ARBIS data system. If we get PDG, we will have most of it built out by the end of 2027. If not, it will take longer. We can create a family portal, provider portal, administrative portal, and workforce portal. For workforce, we're doing discovery and working closely with INCCRRA. We expect early provider/parent portals to be done by end of 2026. Without PDG, it takes longer. We're aiming for unified portals by end of next year. For providers, we need a place where they can see their services, caseloads, employees, and eventually complete digital background checks. We're already putting items in the budget for next year. We hope to have some features by the end of next fiscal year, by July 2027. We need to finish initial licensing implementation by September—rolling out the digital licensing system. Enhancements for background checks would come in spring 2027. These are initial timelines; we still have to refine scope and identify pitfalls.
- Sarah: Would this apply for EI as well?
 - Jessica: Hoping to do a replacement for EI by 2027. The background check piece would support that as well.

11. TAC Year 3 – Looking Ahead – Bela Moté (15 minutes)

Bela led the group through the TAC Year 3 visioning section, where TAC members previewed a high-level timeline for their third year, some proposed content for the first few months of 2026, and Year 3 goals.

From January through June 2026, the TAC's primary focus will be to provide feedback on Transition workstream recommendations to ensure they equitably center families and providers. From June to December 2026, the TAC will work to generate their own final recommendations, while continuing to make meaning of public input all throughout the year.

TAC Year 3 goals include:

- Learn about and provide input on emerging recommendations from transition redesign workstreams and family service workgroups
- Use the TAC Equity Framework to develop a structure for centering equity in meaning making
- Develop final recommendations by December 2026

Incoming Transition workgroup recommendations include:

- ChiByDesign Birth to Three and Service Blueprint
- Funding Design
- Program Standards & Alignment
- Advisory
- Family Service Workgroups

Bela then previewed an overview of TAC members' engagement and feedback during Years 1 and 2. The key takeaways are as follows:

- TAC members have had 12-16 members per meeting so far, with small dips earlier in the year, but overall very strong attendance across the two years of TAC.
- TAC members requested more time for deeper discussion and exploration of meeting content. Some TAC members have expressed interest in occasionally longer or differently timed meetings (e.g., afternoons).
- TAC members overwhelmingly feel the TAC is moving closer to equity. However, several TAC members emphasized the need to ensure equity concepts (e.g., family portraits, engagement strategies, metrics) translate into actionable, anti-bias policies that do not unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or leave out marginalized families.

TAC member quote: "I felt the challenge of time during the meeting very strongly - the discussions are getting much meatier and our ability to interact around important ideas are expanding as our relationships deepen, but time constraints don't allow full exploration of ideas and connecting points. I am looking forward to our full-day meeting!"

For their visioning activity, TAC members engaged in small group discussions to answer the following questions: *What does the TAC need to get to recommendations by December 2026? What is working about our current structure and processes? What is the ideal content/discussion format for our meetings? What would you like to change or revisit?*

During the share-out portion, TAC members described wanting to have clear timelines and buckets of work with deeper dives built in for the TAC to provide input on. They also asked for clear drafts and initial models to react to since the work is too complicated to discuss abstractly. In terms of meeting cadence, TAC members shared they would like more time during meetings where decisions are required for critical workgroups such as funding design or program standards. They are flexible in terms of being willing to stay on for a longer meeting if they are able to dive deeper on a topic, rather than cutting down content to fit a 30-minute presentation window. They also requested materials to be shared in advance and small groups for deeper discussions. They proposed the idea of alternating meeting times between daytime and evening to support access and to allow for sharper discussion. TAC members also shared talking points or a communications toolkit would be helpful to help them communicate updates and decisions to their respective ECE networks, specifically around background checks and parent portal updates to avoid communicating misinformation.

12. Looking Ahead and Next Steps – Bela Moté (5 minutes)

Bela closed out the meeting by thanking all participants for their engagement during the meeting. She shared upcoming meetings and next steps.

Additional Transition Meetings

- Home Visiting Funding Subcommittee
 - Wednesday, December 10, 2025, 11:30AM-1:00PM
- Family, Friend, and Neighbor Funding Subcommittee
 - Thursday, December 11, 2025, 5:00PM-6:30PM
- Listening and Feedback Session on Licensing Redesign: Exemptions
 - Thursday, December 11, 2025, 5:00-6:00PM
- Supporting Children with Disabilities & Developmental Delays Workgroup
 - Tuesday, December 16, 2025, 12:00-1:00PM
- Funding Design Workgroup
 - Wednesday, December 17, 2025, 4:30-6:00PM
- Data, Analytics, and Insights (DAI) Workgroup
 - Thursday, December 18, 2025, 1:00-2:30PM
- Program Standards & Alignment Workgroup
 - Thursday, December 18, 2025, 4:30-6:00PM
- Supporting Multilingual Learners Workgroup
 - Friday, December 19, 2025, 9:00-10:00AM
- Advisory Workgroup
 - Monday, January 12, 2026, 4:00-5:30PM
- Child Care (0-5)/Pre-K Funding Subcommittee
 - Tuesday, January 13, 2026, 1:00-2:30PM
- Next TAC Meeting:
 - Tuesday, January 13, 2026, 5:30-7:00PM

Next Steps

- Follow up email to be sent next week with meeting summary.
- TAC members should reach out to Trish Rooney or Bela Moté with any feedback