



The Governor's Task Force on Children at Risk  
February 6, 2026  
Virtual

(V)Nadine McDonald, Juvenile Justice (Chairman)	(V)Jennifer Tachell– Educator (Vice- Chairman)
(V)Andie Blackwood- DHW, Family & Children Services	(V)Susan Bradford, MD – Pediatrician
(V)Lena Biondolillo- Children with Disabilities	OPEN- Child Advocate Attorney
(V)Sheila Sturgeon Freitas, PhD– Mental Health	(V)Hon. Steve Clark- Civil Magistrate Judge
(V)Curtis Carper- Law Enforcement	(V)Kyle Bringhurst- Prosecuting Attorney
(V)Anthony Henry– Foster Youth	(V)Tahna Barton – CASA
(V)Jill Robertson – Homeless Youth Liaison	(V)Hon. Brent Ferguson- Crim. Magistrate Judge
(V)Trevor Sparrow– Parent	(V)Joshua Wickard- Public Defender
(V)Susan Nalley– Victim Services Coordinator	(V)Teresa Vance- Administrator of the Courts

Mindy Peper – Task Force Support

Indicates Absent (A) Virtual (V)

**Guests:** Dep. Director Monty Prow and Division Administrator Jean Fischer, IDHW

**Meeting Purpose:**

Review subcommittee updates, finalize the budget, and plan the 2026 conference.

**Key Takeaways:**

- **January Meeting Minutes Approved:** Unanimously approved.
- **2026 Conference Venue Secured:** The Riverside Hotel contract is signed for October, given other venue rejections and comparable bids requirement.
- **FY25 Budget Approved:** The FY27 budget was unanimously approved, with carryover funds and DHW support addressing the slight overage.
- **DHW Foster Care Progress:** The foster parent ratio (families:children) reached 1.04, exceeding the 1.0 goal. A critical need remains for foster parents for adolescents (12+) in specific regions.
- **CFRT Analyst Position Recruitment:** The 19-hr/week, in-person, Boise-based CFRT analyst role is approved for posting, with efforts to enhance recruitment.

## Topics

### Welcome and Minutes

- Vice-Chair Jennifer Tachell called the meeting to order and welcomes everyone. Tachell reads the meeting norms.
- Motion to approve the minutes from the January 2026 meeting with noted change to Judge Ferguson's attendance:
  - **Motion to Approve:** Vance
  - **Seconded by:** Tachell
  - **Outcome:** Approved unanimously

### Budget

- **Initial Discussion:** Nadine McDonald initiated the budget discussion, emphasizing the need to set a budget and consider adjustments for the CFRT team support.
- **FY26 Budget Overview:** Mindy Peper presented last year's budget.
- **Funding & Carryover:** Andie Blackwood confirmed total funding is around \$140,000. She noted that being two grant cycles behind allows for some flexibility with carryover funds, making a budget overage manageable.
- **CFRT Analyst Position:**
  - **Challenges:** High turnover for the 19-hr/week, non-benefited analyst role.
  - **Constraints:** The position is capped at 19 hours/week to avoid benefit eligibility and state pay scales determine the wage, preventing direct increases to make it more attractive. It is an in-person, Boise-based role.
  - **Potential Solutions Explored:**
    - **Recruitment/Retention Bonus:** Teresa Vance suggested a \$5,000 one-time recruitment bonus or a \$2,000 ongoing special incentive bonus might be allowable for critical positions.
    - **Volunteer Support:** Susan Bradford and Tahna Barton offered to volunteer their time for tasks like records review, but the de-identification process and confidentiality requirements make this challenging for direct case work. Andie Blackwood noted that record acquisition legwork (calls, follow-ups) is an area where volunteers might assist without accessing confidential data.
  - **Current Status:** The position is currently awaiting CFO approval before being publicly posted.
  - **Budget Adjustment:** Mindy Peper updated the budget to reflect the CFRT coordinator's cost (estimated \$25,000), bringing the total draft budget to ~\$151,000.
- **FY25 Budget Approval:**

- **Motion to approve:** Jennifer Tachell
- **Seconded by:** Teresa Vance
- **Outcome:** Unanimously approved.

### **IDHW Administrative Update**

- **Introduction:** CARTF welcomes Deputy Director Monty Prow and Division Administrator Jean Fischer
- **New DHW Director:** Juliet Charron is the new director, succeeding Alex Adams, who is now Administrator of ACF in D.C. Charron has been with DHW for over a decade and will have her Senate confirmation next week.
- **WIG (Wildly Important Goal) Update:**
  - **Goal:** Increase foster parents and safely reduce kids in care.
  - **Progress:** The foster family ratio increased from 0.74 (July 2024) to 1.04 (over 100 families for every 100 kids in need), marking a 42% increase. The goal is 1.5.
  - **Regional Breakdown:**
    - Region 1: 1.54 (met goal)
    - Region 2: 1.15
    - Region 3: 0.84
    - Region 4: 0.99
    - Region 5: 0.90
    - Region 6: 0.99
    - Region 7: 1.33
  - **Critical Need:** Placement for adolescents (12+), as many foster families prefer younger children.
  - **Call for Support:** Monty-IDHW requested CARTF's help with regional foster parent recruitment, especially for older youth, possibly through local community groups. Anthony Henry suggested public radio spots with teen testimonials to reframe foster care for older kids. Sheila Freitas proposed a sponsorship/mentorship program for older kids, building relationships before placement.
- **Congregate Care:**
  - **Reduction:** Down from ~250 (247) to 181 kids. Goal is 160 by end of fiscal year, 120 by end of calendar year.

- **Out-of-State Placements:** Reduced from 75 to 28.
- **New Facility:** The Payette Assessment Center has closed, replaced by the Birch center on the SWITC campus. Birch has a 12-kid capacity (with potential for expansion) and offers better conditions (e.g., outdoor space), leading to reduced incidents. DHW now uses single caseworkers per facility to build relationships.
- **Complex Needs:** Kids entering congregate care have increasingly complex mental health and abuse issues making placement more difficult.
- **Canyon County Case:**
  - **Summary:** A 12-day-old infant died in Canyon County. The biological parents had five prior Termination of Parental Rights (TPRs) cases, the last ending in November 2024. Despite a call from a former adoptive parent expressing concern, DHW and law enforcement could not locate the parents.
  - **DHW Response:** The initial report was a Priority 3, as there was no specific allegation of imminent harm or location information. Staff still viewed it as a priority despite typical criteria for filing such cases as "information only."
  - **Duty to Report:** Jean emphasized the importance of everyone's duty to report suspected child abuse or neglect, noting that someone knew the parents' location but did not provide the information.
  - **Legislative Interest:** Representative Tanner is proposing legislation to make prior TPRs a Priority 1 factor in future reports.
  - **Ombudsman Finding:** Trevor Sparrow confirmed his office is reviewing the case and preliminary findings indicate all agencies "absolutely acted appropriately with the knowledge that they had."
- **Legislation Updates:**
  - **SB 1257 (Senator Wintrow):** Codifies visitation rules for parents accused of serious abuse of their child, ensuring whether court-ordered visitation is in the child's best interest and supervised. It also allows courts to consider the length of parental incarceration relative to a child's life in TPR decisions, especially for younger children.
  - **Senator Galloway's Clean-up Bill:** Printed but not yet numbered. It aims to:
    - Remove the 60-day court review requirement for older children in extended foster care (returning to six-month updates).
    - Clarify kin and relative definitions across statute and rule to promote early kin placement.

- **Governor's Office Appointments:** Jean is actively following up with Sarah (Governor's office) and Tamara (appointments person) regarding the re-appointment of task force members whose terms have expired.
- **Foster Care WIG Data Handout:** Monty agreed to share the data breakdown with Mindy Peper for distribution to the task force.

### Subcommittee Updates

- **Legislative Subcommittee:**
  - **Meeting Schedule:** Weekly meetings scheduled for Mondays at 9:00 AM MST, starting February 9th, until March 23rd.
  - **Facilitator:** Teresa Vance will facilitate the February 23rd meeting as Nadine McDonald will be out.
  - **Tracker:** Teresa Vance has started a legislation tracker spreadsheet and will share it with the subcommittee.
- **Grants Subcommittee:**
  - **Grant Cycle:** Cycle 2025-2 opened on February 1st.
  - **Non-Compliance:** Elmore County has not submitted its final report from the previous cycle despite multiple requests from Mindy and others on the task force.
  - **Policy:** The Grants Committee will maintain a list of non-compliant grantees; future funding will be withheld until past reports are current. Andie Blackwood will investigate if DHW contracting has additional enforcement mechanisms for non-compliance, particularly regarding unspent funds.
  - **Application Updates:** Mindy Peper updated the grant application to include language on lobbying, grant writing, prevention, and state meal guidance.
- **MDT Subcommittee:**
  - **Training Materials:** Kyle Bringhurst is looking into developing materials to help new MDTs get started.
  - **Collaboration:** Kyle connected with the Western Region CAC director at the San Diego conference, who will brainstorm resources for non-functioning MDTs and reach out to Sonja (Idaho Network of CACs).

### 2026 Conference Planning & San Diego Delegation Report

- **Venue:**
  - **Bids:** Mindy Peper struggled to obtain three comparable bids for the conference due to venue availability (Grove, Hilton, Visit Idaho) for a 200-person, four-breakout room event. Jump also had little success.

- **Clarification:** Andie Blackwood confirmed with Karla that bids must be comparable (large conference room + four breakouts). Karla advised to sign the Riverside Hotel contract as two documented refusals suffice.
- **Decision:** Mindy Peper will sign the Riverside Hotel contract to secure the October date.
- **Potential Alternative:** Jennifer Tachell mentioned the Meridian School District training center as a no-cost venue option if only a bid is needed, although breakout room availability for October is uncertain.
- **San Diego Delegation Report:**
  - **Overall Impression:** Some excellent sessions, some not. The good ones will inform speaker selection for the 2026 conference.
  - **Speaker Highlights:**
    - **Jennifer Hillgoth (Aurora, IL Police Department):** Dynamic speaker on "Disbelief of Children in Investigations," with expertise in child law, forensics, and child death review. Seen as a strong candidate to appeal to law enforcement.
    - **Andy (Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigations):** Engaging speaker on "Female Perpetrated Crimes" and "The Weight We Carried" (resilience in trauma-heavy fields). She is sponsored by the National Criminal Justice Training Center, potentially covering travel costs.
    - **Lori Poland:** Survivor keynote speaker (kidnapped at 3, found three days later) with a compelling story focused on resilience, not victimhood. Potential keynote/endnote speaker.
    - **Joe (Law Enforcement):** Presented on fentanyl overdoses in children, emphasizing inter-agency cooperation in investigations. Also presents on abusive head trauma.
    - **Amy Russell:** Presented on assessing children's statements and the ethics of MDT work.
    - **Joyce Kruzak and Kelsey Roberts (Western Regional Children's Advocacy Center):** Presented on understanding role clarity within MDT.
  - **Future Planning:**
    - **2027 Conference:** Brainstorming an MDT-focused theme. The idea of bringing back Jennifer Hillgoth for an MDT-focused keynote in 2027 was discussed.

## Spring Meeting Planning

- **March:** Ashley Dow (IDJC), District 2 and District 5 Citizen Review Panels (virtual).
- **April/May:** More Citizen Review Panels. The OPE (Office of Performance Evaluations) is also planning to attend in April or May.
- **Jen Rupe (Human Trafficking Report):** Mindy Peper will invite Jen Rupe to present her 2026 Idaho Human Trafficking Report in April or May.

## New Business

- **Audrey Dutton (ProPublica):** Dr Bradford updated the group that Audrey Dutton (ProPublica, previously covered the Onyx case) is working on an article about faith healing. She is seeking physicians to review cases for preventability and may attend CARTF meetings.
- **Book Delivery:** Teresa Vance mentioned her assistant is distributing books, including 150 copies to Health and Welfare and shipments to districts, CASA, MDTs, and CRPs.
- **Publications:** Community resource publications will now be housed and mailed out by the Department of Health and Welfare at their State Street office.

## Adjournment

## Next Steps

- **Mindy Peper:**
  - Sign the Riverside Hotel contract.
  - Schedule weekly Legislative subcommittee meetings (Feb 9th – Mar 23rd, 9:00 AM MST).
  - Invite Jen Rupe (human trafficking report) to speak in Spring.
- **Jennifer Tachell:**
  - Send the draft conference agenda to Mindy.
- **Teresa Vance:**
  - Share the legislation tracker spreadsheet with the Legislative subcommittee.
- **Andie Blackwood:**
  - Confirm with Karla that two bids are sufficient for the conference venue.
  - Investigate DHW contracting mechanisms for non-compliant grantees.
- **Jean (DHW):**

- Follow up with the Governor's office on task force member reappointments.
- **Monty (DHW):**
  - Share the foster care WIG data handout with Mindy.
- **CARTF:**
  - Explore regional support for foster parent recruitment, particularly for adolescents.

**Next meeting:** March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026- Hybrid/ SpringHill Suites (424 E ParkCenter Blvd, Boise)