Midwestern Legislative Conference
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

casey family programs

CSG fosters the interstate exchange of insights and ideas to help state officials shape public policy, and it offers unparalleled regional, national and international opportunities to network, develop leaders, collaborate and create problem-solving partnerships. This convening for Midwestern state legislators was made possible in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide, improve – and ultimately prevent the need for – foster care.

CSG Midwest and Casey Family Programs thank the Robert R. McCormick Foundation for its generous donation of the beautiful meeting space at Cantigny Park and Golf Course for this two-day academy.

CANTIGNY

ROBERT R. McCORMICK FOUNDATION

Officers of the CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference Health & Human Services Committee

Rep. Anna Moeller Illinois, Co- Chair | Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, South Dakota, Co-Chair
Rep. Brett Barker, Iowa, Vice Chair

Building Better Outcomes in Child Welfare Systems Policy Academy

Agenda

Arrival | Wednesday, November 11, 2026

Chicago Naperville Marriott | Naperville, Illinois

5:30-7:30 p.m.	**Opening Reception**

This reception is open to all participants in the policy academy. Complimentary food and drinks will be provided throughout the reception, and you will have the chance to meet other attendees and begin building relationships in advance of the academy. The reception will be in the Bailey/Hobson Room at the Chicago Marriott Naperville, the host hotel for this convening.

Day 1 | Thursday, November 12, 2026

Cantigny Park and Golf Course | Wheaton, Illinois

7:15 a.m.	**Transport to meeting venue**
	A bus will take participants from the Chicago Marriott Naperville to Cantigny Park and Golf Course. Please meet at the front of the hotel by 7:15 a.m.; the **bus will depart at 7:25 a.m.** If you are driving a personal vehicle, proceed to: **Cantigny Golf Club, 27w270 Mack Road Wheaton, IL 60189** Contact CSG Midwest's Tim Anderson at 630.200.7635 if you have questions about transportation or need assistance.
7:45-8:30 a.m.	**Breakfast**
	A buffet breakfast will be available for everyone at Cantigny Park and Golf Course.
8:30-8:50 a.m.	**Welcome and Introductions** Robert R. McCormick Foundation Director Mr. Bryan Stokes will provide a welcome to Cantigny Park. CSG Midwest Director Ms. Laura Tomaka will introduce the officers of the CSG Midwestern Legislative Conference Health & Human Services Committee. We also will go around the table for brief introductions by all participants. **Access all meeting materials:** https://tinyurl.com/CaseyCSGMidwest
8:50-10:30 a.m.	**Foundations of A Well-Functioning Child Welfare System: A Framework for Legislative Action** Two leading experts with deep knowledge of state child welfare systems will explore fundamental questions for legislators seeking to pursue systemic improvements and better outcomes for children and families. What are the missions of these systems? How are they funded? How do we determine whether a system is functioning well and where improvements need to be made? *Moderator: **Ms. Kara Wood**, Senior Director of Public Policy, Casey Family Programs* *Featured Presenters:* ***Ms. Janée Harvey**, Division Director of Family Well-Being and Protection, Iowa Department of Health & Human Services* ***Mr. David Sanders, PhD,** Executive Vice President of Systems Improvement, Casey Family Programs*

Day 1 *continued* |Thursday, November 12, 2026

10:30-10:45 a.m.	**Break**

Feel free to step outside and enjoy the grounds of Cantigny Park and Golf Course.

10:45-12:00 p.m. **Child Safety: Building a Safety Culture and Systems of Support**

Ensuring children are safe from abuse and neglect is a central principle of state child welfare systems. It requires thoughtful policies in areas such as how to address and treat substance abuse among caregivers, how to assess dangers, how to determine family separation and placement settings, and how to provide effective home-based services for at-risk families. This session will explore promising practices in the states.

Moderator: ***Ms. Katie Stoehr****, Managing Director of Strategic Consulting, Casey Family Programs*

Featured Presenters:
Mr. Michael Cull, PhD, *President/CEO and Founder, Center for the Helping Professions*
Ms. Jennifer McAllister, MD, *Medical Director, STEP Clinic, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center*

12:00 -1:00 p.m.	**Lunch**

A buffet lunch will be offered to all. This also is a chance to continue the dialogue.

1:00-1:30 p.m. **Table Activity: Understanding the Successes and Challenges in Child Welfare and What the Data Tell Us**

Following lunch, participants will be grouped by state and assigned to a table to spend time exploring the data in their jurisdiction. Key data from each Midwestern state's child welfare system will be reviewed, with participants also examining how this information can be used by state legislatures for oversight and prioritization of future work.

Casey staff will support the table activity discussions.

Day 1 *continued* |Thursday, November 12, 2026

1:30-2:30 p.m. **Peer-to-Peer Exchange & Roundtable Discussion**

With one another, as well as the help of the morning's expert presenters, participants will discuss their perspectives on and insights into these and other questions:

- What experiences, either your own or those of your constituents, inform your work on child welfare as a legislator?
- How should your state measure success or determine areas in need of improvement in its child welfare system?
- What do you see as the top one or two child welfare challenges that need to be addressed in your state?
- What in the data from your state stood out to you or struck you as particularly important to your work as a legislator?

2:30-2:45 p.m. **Break**

Feel free to step outside and enjoy the grounds of Cantigny Park and Golf Course.

2:45-4:00 p.m. **More Than Child Protection: State Partnerships To Address the Needs of At-Risk Youth**

Within every child welfare system, states care for children and adolescents with severe behavioral, mental health, emotional, and/or medical challenges. Meeting their needs requires cooperation among state education, juvenile justice, and health systems. This session will explore state-led pathways for effective partnerships, legislative accountability, and better outcomes.

Moderator: ***Ms. Katie Stoehr****, Director-Strategic Consulting, Casey Family Programs*

Featured Presenters:
Ms. Ruby Goyal-Carkeek*, Deputy Commissioner of the Children's System of Care, New Jersey Department of Children and Families*
Ms. Meaghan Jorgensen*, Chief, Illinois Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative*

4:00 p.m. **Return to the Chicago Marriott Naperville**

Day 1 *continued* | Thursday, November 12, 2026

6:00-8:00 p.m.	**Dinner for all at Granite City Food & Brewery**

Everyone is invited for a complimentary dinner and drinks at Granite City Food & Brewery, 1828 Abriter Court in Naperville.

It is a half-mile, 10-minute walk from the Chicago Marriott Naperville (host hotel). Starting at around 5:30 p.m., CSG Midwest staff will guide all attendees from the hotel to the Granite City restaurant. Additionally, CSG Midwest staff will be available to transport attendees by car from the hotel to the restaurant.

Please contact CSG Midwest's Tim Anderson at 630.200.7635 if you have questions or need assistance.

Day 2 | Friday, November 13, 2026

7:15 a.m.	**Transport to meeting venue**

If you are departing Friday, please check out of your room. The bus will be returning to the hotel so you can leave your luggage at the front desk. A bus will take participants from the Chicago Marriott Naperville to Cantigny Park and Golf Course. Please meet at the front of the hotel by 7:15 a.m.; the **bus will depart at 7:25 a.m.**

If you are driving a personal vehicle, proceed to: **Cantigny Golf Club, 27w270 Mack Road Wheaton, IL 60189**

Contact CSG Midwest's Tim Anderson at 630.200.7635 if you have questions about transportation or need assistance.

7:45-8:30 a.m.	**Breakfast**

A buffet breakfast will be available for everyone at Cantigny Park and Golf Course.

8:30-8:45 a.m.	**Objectives of Day 2 and Reflecting on Day 1**

Day 2 *continued* | Friday, November 13, 2026

8:45-10:15 a.m. **Shifting Federal Policy and New Opportunities for State Innovations in Child Welfare**

In this session, participants will learn how recent federal laws, programs, and policies – including implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act and A Home for Every Child – are opening new funding opportunities and policy options for states.

Featured Presenter:
***Mr. Cody Inman**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families*

10:15-10:30 a.m. **Break**

Feel free to step outside and enjoy the grounds of Cantigny Park and Golf Course.

10:30-11:30 a.m. **Strategies to Improve Outcomes for Children While In Out-of-Home Care**

When children cannot remain safely in their homes, there are strategies states can take to reduce trauma for children while working to address safety concerns. Research shows that placing children with kin not only minimizes the trauma of removal and separation, but increases their likelihood of remaining connected to siblings, families of origin, and community – all of which improves their overall well-being. When a home that is known to the child is not available, there are strategies that can be utilized to include siblings, families of origin, and community when a child is placed in a traditional foster home. This session will focus on policy options for states to improve placement decisions, improve visitation where appropriate, and support trusted family members, "fictive kin," or traditional foster homes that provide in-home care.

Moderator: ***Ms. Carol Self**, Director of Public Policy, Casey Family Programs*

Featured Presenters:
***Ms. Ana Beltran**, Director of Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A Technical Assistance Center, Generations United*
***Ms. Emily Medere, DBA,** Vice President of Child Welfare, Brightpoint*

Day 2 *continued* | Friday, November 13, 2026

11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Finding Permanency and Stability for Children and Youth

It is not uncommon for children to spend years away from loving families and to linger in the "deep end" of child welfare systems — for example, in foster care and congregate care before aging out. States are leaning in to strategies that safely reduce time in care and identifying options that address the unique needs of each child or youth. Finding "forever homes" for children who cannot safely reunify with their parent(s) is a goal all state child welfare systems share. This session will feature a promising model for finding the right homes for children waiting much too long to find permanency, Wendy's Wonderful Kids. The presentation will be followed by a roundtable discussion on how to improve permanency, safety, and long-term outcomes in child welfare systems.

Moderator: ***Ms. Kara Wood****, Senior Director of Public Policy, Casey Family Programs*

Featured Presenters:
Ms. Rita Soronen*, President & CEO, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption*
Ms. Melinda Haggerty*, Senior Vice President, General Counsel, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption*

12:30-1:00 p.m. **Lunch**

A buffet lunch will be offered to all. During this time, too, staff from Casey Family Programs and CSG Midwest will reach out to participating legislators to seek their input on what future research, technical assistance, or programming they need to take the next steps for improving child welfare systems in their states.

Day 2 *continued* | Friday, November 13, 2026

1:00-2:15 p.m. **Prevention and Focused Community Models**

Meeting family needs early helps children avoid the compounding trauma of abuse, neglect, and removal into foster care. By supporting families within their neighborhoods, prevention allows children to remain safely at home, maintaining critical ties to their extended families, community, and local support networks rather than experiencing system involvement. This session will explore impactful, community-based strategies that support safe and stable families including those struggling with substance use disorders, mental health, and other drivers of instability.

Moderator: ***Ms. Carol Self****, Director of Public Policy, Casey Family Programs*

Featured Presenters:
Ms. Page Humphrey, *Director, THRIVE Iowa*
Mr. Adrien Lewis*, Founder and President, CarePortal*
Ms. Lindsay Smith*, Founder and Executive Director, Radical Life*

2:15-2:30pm **Closing Reflections/Wrap Up**

Casey staff, CSG Midwest staff, and Health and Human Services Committee co-chairs will conclude with observations on the days' discussions and offer space of participants to provide closing thoughts.

2:30 p.m. **Return to the Chicago Marriott Naperville**

Access all meeting materials: https://tinyurl.com/CaseyCSGMidwest

Contributor Biographies



Ana Beltran

At Generations United, Ana Beltran is Director of the Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network, the only national technical assistance center for those who serve grandfamilies and kinship families. For more than 25 years, she has worked with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the legal community on issues impacting kinship/grandfamilies. An attorney, Ms. Beltran served as co-author of the first set of the comprehensive, highly influential "National Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards." She also was part of the team that created the Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Standards and currently is a member of the federal Advisory Council on Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

Contact information: *abeltran@gu.org*



Michael Cull

As the President/CEO and Founder of the Center for the Helping Professions, Michael Cull leads the nonprofit organization's work in bringing evidence-based approaches and safety science to critical sectors such as state and local child welfare systems. He has built a diverse body of work spanning many different helping systems, specializing in how to apply the sciences of safety and quality. Previously, Dr. Cull served as Deputy Commissioner of Child Health for the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. He also has held positions at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall, and the University of Kentucky College of Public Health.

Contact information: *michael.cull@helpingprofessions.org*



Ruby Goyal-Carkeek

A nationally recognized leader in children's and family services, Ruby Goyal-Carkeek is Deputy Commissioner of New Jersey's Our Children's System of Care. She came to the position in July after serving three years as the Director of Behavioral Health and Child Welfare at the Center for Health Care Strategies. Ms. Goyal-Carkeek has more than 30 years of experience in children's behavioral health systems, including previous leadership roles with New Jersey, a state that has worked to integrate child welfare and behavioral health and to have its services centered on early intervention, family strengthening, and community-based support.

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Melinda Haggerty

At the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Melinda Haggerty serves as Senior Vice President and General Counsel, overseeing the Foundation's legal affairs while also providing child welfare-related legal expertise in the development of trainings and materials for legal audiences. Ms. Haggerty previously served as Director of Children's Initiatives at the Ohio Attorney General's Office. In that role, she helped lead key policy advances in areas related to human trafficking, child welfare, and juvenile justice. A former youth in foster care, Ms. Haggerty currently volunteers as an appointed member of the Ohio Children's Trust Fund Board, which oversees state child welfare prevention activities in Ohio.

Contact: *melinda.haggerty@davethomasfoundation.org*



Janée Harvey

Janée Harvey is the Division Director of Family Well-Being and Protection for the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. She brings a wealth of experience to this position. Ms. Harvey worked as a social worker in New York and has provided services for runaway and homeless teens, LGBTQ young people and families, and youths involved with the child welfare system. Her previous positions in Iowa have included serving as the Child Welfare and Community Services Bureau Chief and as the Division Administrator for Adult, Children and Family Services. Ms. Harvey also has been a foster parent and is an adoptive parent.

Contact: *janee.harvey@hhs.iowa.gov*



Page Humphrey

As part of her leadership responsibilities as Community Services Bureau Chief for the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Page Humphrey serves as Director of Thrive Iowa — an innovative, community-led initiative that is directed by the state and built on the collective impact model to help families move from crisis to stability. Prior to becoming Bureau Chief, Ms. Humphrey served as a Program Manager for a statewide home visiting program, worked as a Workforce Program Coordinator for disability programs at Iowa Workforce Development, and was a Neuro-Resource Facilitator at the Brain Injury Alliance of Iowa.

Contact: *page.humphrey@hhs.iowa.gov*



Cody Inman

As Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Cody Inman oversees agency-wide programs that advance the well-being of children, youths, and families. Additionally, he performs the duties of the Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (delegated). Mr. Inman previously served as a Senior Advisor at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and as a Senior Policy Advisor to the governor of Oklahoma. He also held senior leadership roles at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, leading reforms across child welfare, disability, and aging systems.

Contact information: *Cody.Inman@ACF.hhs.gov*



Meaghan Jorgensen

Meaghan Jorgensen serves as Chief of the Illinois Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative. Prior to this role, Jorgensen served as Director of Operations for the initiative and was one of its original team members. She is overseeing day-to-day operations of Illinois' comprehensive and coordinated effort to strengthen and improve behavioral health services for youths. Ms. Jorgensen has held policy and administrative positions in state government since 2019, with a concentration in child welfare; she previously served as Executive Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. She also is a former County State's Attorney and has worked in numerous government affairs roles and consulting positions in the private sector.

Contact: *Meaghan.Jorgensen@Illinois.gov*



Adrien Lewis

Adrien Lewis is the Founder and President of CarePortal, a care-sharing technology that helps neighbors see and serve their most vulnerable neighbors with resources and relationship, in real time, and provides a structured pathway for agencies to partner with trusted community organizations, nonprofits, and responders to create meaningful local connections that change lives. Mr. Lewis began his career as a business development professional, spending a decade working in healthcare, technology, and education. In 2007, a mission trip to Haiti with his wife, Cynthia, transformed his perspective and deepened his calling. Over the next three years, he volunteered with The Global Orphan Project and witnessed firsthand the power of connection in caring for vulnerable children. Mr. Lewis also is a foster and adoptive parent.

Contact: *adrien.Lewis@careportal.org*



Jennifer McAllister

Jennifer McAllister is a pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center with a clinical and research focus on infants and children with prenatal opioid exposure. She is the Medical Director at the hospital's STEP (Supporting Those with Exposures Prenatally) Clinic, which provides follow-up care for young children and their families. She is an Assistant Professor in the University of Cincinnati Department of Pediatrics. Dr. McAllister also has specialized interests in newborn care and breastfeeding and is an International Certified Lactation Consultant.

Contact information: *jennifer.mcallister@cchmc.org*



Emily Medere

Emily Medere serves as Vice President of Child Welfare at Brightpoint, leading the nonprofit organization's work in helping families and their children navigate challenges, prevent problems before they become life-altering crises, and supporting family stabilization and preservation. Before her time at Brightpoint, Dr. Medere served as Chief of Staff for the South Carolina Department of Social Services. She has extensive experience in child welfare, from being a frontline investigations case manager, to building and implementing evidence-based services for non-custodial families, to developing support programs for foster children and parents. Her focus is on creating systems that support families and promote better outcomes for children.

Contact information: *emedere@brightpoint.org*



David Sanders

As Casey Family Programs' Executive Vice President of Systems Improvement, David Sanders provides strategic direction over the foundation's work with child welfare systems to improve practice, with an emphasis on safely reducing the number of children in foster care. Dr. Sanders also oversees the foundation's public policy and research work. He previously directed all operations for the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, overseeing a decrease in foster care population there while safety and stability measures improved. He previously served as Director of the Children, Family and Adult Services Department for Minnesota's Hennepin County. In 2013, Dr. Sanders was appointed Chair of President Obama's Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities.

Contact information: *dsanders@casey.org*



Carol Self

Carol Self serves as a Director of Public Policy for Casey Family Programs and helps guide the foundation's policy work in the states of the U.S. South. She helps provide nonpartisan, accessible, evidence-based information and data to educate and inform investments and policies that benefit children and families. She came to this position at Casey Family Programs after many years of service and leadership at the Texas Department of Family and Prevention Services, including as the agency's Director of Permanency. She continues to lead efforts in Texas to improve systems and policy that expedite permanency for children and youths in the department's conservatorship.

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Lindsay Smith

The Co-founder and Executive Director of the Kansas-based Radical Life, Lindsay Smith leads the organization's efforts to strengthen families and prevent foster care placements in and around Lyon County. This work centers on addressing the root causes of poverty and creating pathways for community members, businesses, churches, civic groups, and individuals to serve and support at-risk families with faith, love, and integrity. She brings to this position a decade of foster parenting experience, a passion for empowering families before crisis hits, and a firm belief that transformation begins with relationships.

Contact information: *lindsay@radicallifeemporia.com*



Rita Soronen

Since 2001, Rita Soronen has served as President and CEO of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, a national, nonprofit public charity. For more than 40 years, she has worked on behalf of abused, neglected and vulnerable children, leading numerous efforts to improve juvenile justice and child welfare systems. At the Foundation, Ms. Soronen works to find permanent families for the more than 130,000 waiting children in North America's foster care systems, including through award-winning programs such as Wendy's Wonderful Kids. A nationally recognized child welfare advocate, Ms. Soronen previously served as Executive Director of Court Appointed Special Advocates for Franklin County, Ohio.

Contact information: *Rita.Soronen@davethomasfoundation.org*



Katie Stoehr

Katie Stoehr brings a vast array of experience and expertise to her current role as Managing Director at Casey Family Programs, the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care while improving the safety and well-being of children. In her previous role as deputy commissioner for the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, she helped lead a number of groundbreaking initiatives related to child welfare and behavioral health, including supportive-housing programs to preserve families and prevent foster care placements, a statewide home-visiting program for families with newborns, and investments in various other evidence-based models.

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Simone Weil

As a Director of Public Policy at Casey Family Programs, Simone Weil engages with policymakers and child welfare stakeholders to advance Casey's mission to safely reduce the need for foster care. Prior to joining Casey, she was a Principal for Policy Analysis and Development at the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), where she oversaw policy issues at the intersections of infrastructure funding, economic competitiveness, and demographic shifts. Ms. Weil began her career at one of the nation's oldest and largest community foundations, The Chicago Community Trust, where she supported human services and education grant making. She also served under the Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools, managing the development of a city-wide vision for high-quality schools in every neighborhood.

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Kara Wood

Kara Wood is the Senior Director of Public Policy at Casey Family Programs, bringing years of child welfare experience to this leadership position. Ms. Wood previously served as Chief of Staff for the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services. At Casey Family Programs, she oversees policy work for the foundation, which provides nonpartisan, accessible, evidence-based information and data to educate and inform investments and policies that benefit children and families. Ms. Wood also has served as Director of Communications and Policy for the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and as Communications Director for the National Partnership for Women and Families.

Contact information: *kwood@csg.org*

Legislator Biographies



Wisconsin Rep. Margaret Arney

Elected in 2024, Margaret Arney came to office as a longtime community volunteer, as a nonprofit development leader, and as an instructor in the Social Work Department at Concordia University Wisconsin. She previously served as an alderperson for the town of Wauwatosa. This biennium, Rep. Arney served on two Wisconsin Assembly committees: Transportation and Review of Administrative Rules. Her legislative priorities include making new state investments to help young children and their families.



Iowa Rep. Brett Barker

Elected in 2024, Brett Barker served as vice chair of the Iowa Health and Human Services Committee during his first term in office. He has significant experience in issues related to foster care. Outside the Legislature, he serves as vice president of operations for NuCara Pharmacy. He is a pharmacist and former mayor for the Iowa town of Nevada. Rep. Barker's other legislative responsibilities this biennium included serving on committees on economic growth and natural resources. Rep. Barker is vice chair of The Council of State Governments Midwestern Legislative Conference Health and Human Services Committee.



Indiana Rep. Maureen Bauer

First elected in 2020, Maureen Bauer represents the town of South Bend where she was born and raised. She served on four Indiana House committees this biennium: Courts and Criminal Code, Environmental Affairs, Judiciary, and Public Health. An educator, Rep. Bauer has led policy work in her state in a number of policy areas, from environmental protection and sustainable agriculture, to K-12 education policy and youth services.



Iowa Rep. Michael Bergan

First elected to the Iowa House in 2016, Michael Bergan served on three key legislative committees this biennium: Appropriations, Health and Human Services, and State Government. He also is chair of the Joint Administration and Regulation Appropriations Subcommittee. A tax accountant by profession, Rep. Bergan has served on numerous state and community boards, including those working to improve early-intervention services for young children.



Kansas Rep. Lauren Bohi

Elected in 2024, Lauren Bohi prioritized making improvements to Medicaid, foster care, and mental health services during her first biennium in office. A longtime community volunteer who has worked extensively with children, Rep. Bohi has spent time working in both small businesses and at nonprofit organizations, including a local behavioral health facility serving young people and their families. Her committee work this biennium included serving on committees focused on economic development and labor, energy, the judiciary, and financial institutions.



Illinois Rep.-Elect Erica Bray-Parker

Ericka Bray-Parker won election to the Illinois House in 2026. A high school civics teacher for 25-plus years, she served on the Wheaton City Council. She also has been an elected member of the Illinois Education Association Board of Directors, worked on education advisory committees for state and federal elected officials, and volunteers at her church and through a variety of local non-profit organizations.



Ohio Rep. Sean Patrick Brennan

An award-winning teacher with three decades of service in Ohio's public schools, Sean Patrick Brennan was first elected to the state House in 2022 after many years as a Parma City Council member. He serves on the Education Committee as well as three other House or joint committees: Energy, Local Government, Public Insurance and Pensions, and Agency Rule Review (joint). Rep. Brennan's deep involvement in numerous local charitable and community organizations has included founding and serving as an adviser to the Parma Youth Commission.



Illinois Sen. Terri Bryant

First elected to the Illinois General Assembly in 2014, Terri Bryant served three terms in the House before being elected to the Senate in 2020. She was chosen assistant leader for her caucus in 2023. Her responsibilities also include membership on several committees, including in areas such as behavioral and mental health, public safety, education, agriculture, and energy. She worked for many years as a public service administrator for the Illinois Department of Corrections and also has experience in the farming and service industries.



Illinois Rep. Mary Beth Canty

An attorney with experience serving on the Arlington Heights Village Board and on the Regional Transportation Authority Board of Directors, Mary Beth Canty first won election to the Illinois House in 2022. This biennium, she served on the House Child Care Access and Early Childhood Committee, plus other committees in areas such as state budgeting, housing, the judiciary, transportation, and veterans affairs. Rep. Canty has been a legislative advocate of expanding education opportunities for young children and various social justice reforms.



Kansas Rep. Ford Carr

First elected to the Kansas House in 2022, Ford Carr served this biennium on the House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee and the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight. He also served on committees related to transportation, legislative modernization, and welfare reform. Rep. Carr is a longtime community activist and aeronautical engineer by profession who spent much of his career in the aviation industry.



Illinois Rep. Margaret DeLaRosa

Margaret DeLaRosa was appointed to the House in October 2025 and won election in 2026. During her first legislative term, Rep. DeLaRosa served on the House Adoption and Child Welfare Committee as well as on the Human Services Committee. Her committee responsibilities also include work in areas such as mental health, addiction and healthcare. Her professional background is in corporate management, and she served as a local school board president before joining the General Assembly.



South Dakota Rep. Eric Emery

A longtime paramedic and emergency medicine administrator, Eric Emery was first elected to the House in 2022. He served as a member of the House Health and Human Services Committee in 2026 as well as two other committees: Government Operations and Audit and State Affairs. Rep. Emery's legislative focus includes ensuring South Dakota's rural and tribal communities have access to quality emergency, health, and human services systems.



Ohio Rep. Sarah Fowler Arthur

First elected to the Ohio House in 2020, Sarah Fowler Arthur was chair of the House Education Committee this biennium while also serving on the Children and Human Services, Community Revitalization, and Local Government committees. She previously served on the Ohio State Board of Education. Rep. Fowler is a lifelong entrepreneur who currently owns and operates SFIA Enterprises and Badger Run Berries, is involved in numerous community organizations in Ashtabula, and is a licensed foster parent.



Kansas Rep. Cyndi Howerton

Cyndi Howerton has been a member of the House since 2021 and served in two key leadership positions this biennium: chair of the Kansas House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee and of the Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight. She also is part of House committees on legislative modernization and taxation. A tax service manager, Rep. Howerton's extensive volunteer work has included helping individuals battling mental health issues and assisting families during times of infant loss.



Indiana Rep. Carolyn Jackson

First elected to the Indiana House in 2018, Carolyn Jackson was assistant whip for her caucus this biennium while also serving on multiple legislative committees: Family, Children and Human Affairs; Elections and Apportionment, Environmental Affairs; and Natural Resources. A sociologist and counselor by training, Rep. Jackson's career included serving as an adult probation officer and supervisor. She also has experience working to protect the rights of children.



Illinois Rep. Anna Moeller

First elected to the General Assembly in 2014, Anna Moeller is chair of the House Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee and also leads the Medicaid Working Group. Her other responsibilities in the Illinois House include serving on committees focused on human services, K-12 education, and energy and the environment. Rep. Moeller is co-chair of The Council of State Governments Midwestern Legislative Conference Health and Human Services Committee. She previously served on the Elgin City Council.



South Dakota Rep. Erik Muckey

First elected to the House in 2022, Erik Muckey is a small-business owner who helps nonprofits, charitable foundations, and social-impact businesses improve their effectiveness and impact. He also built the nonprofit organization Lost&Found, which focuses on suicide prevention and loss survivor programs for youths and adults. He has become a champion on these issues since joining the Legislature. In 2026, Rep. Muckey's committee work included service on House and joint legislative budget committees.



Illinois Rep. Michelle Mussman

Michelle Mussman was first elected to the Illinois House in 2010. This biennium, she served as chair of the House Education Policy Committee as well as a member of the Adoption and Child Welfare Committee. She also was member of legislative committees focused on housing, mental health and addiction, public health, and human rights. Her work in the community has included work for the Children's Advocacy Center of North and Northwest Cook County.



Kansas Rep. Jarrod Ousley

Jarrod Ousley was first elected in 2013 and has become an important leader on child welfare policy over his more than decade of service in the Legislature. This biennium, he served as ranking minority member of the House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee. A small-business owner outside the Legislature, he also is part of a joint legislative committee on child welfare oversight. Rep. Ousley's other duties include serving on House budget, education, and welfare reform committees.



Minnesota Rep. Dave Pinto

First elected in 2014, Dave Pinto is a policy leader on efforts to protect the well-being of children, as well as in areas such as criminal legal reform and community safety. He is a county prosecutor, specializing in cases of domestic assault and sex trafficking. This biennium, he served as co-chair of the House Workforce, Labor, and Economic Development Finance and Policy Committee. He also was his caucus lead on a fraud-prevention committee and a member of House committees on public safety and the state budget.



Nebraska Sen. Dan Quick

Nebraska Sen. Dan Quick was first elected to the Unicameral Legislature in 2016 and then returned for a second stint after being elected in 2024. His public service outside the legislative arena includes serving on the Board of Directors for the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers, a group dedicated to providing high-quality, child-friendly services across the state via multidisciplinary teams that respond to allegations of child abuse. Sen. Quick serves on several standing committees in Nebraska, including Health & Human Services.



Michigan Rep. John Roth

John Roth was first elected in 2020 to the Michigan House, and this biennium, he assumed several leadership positions on state budgeting. That included serving as chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services and vice chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education and Community College. His other committee assignments included being a member of two appropriations subcommittees: Medicaid and Behavioral Health; and Agriculture and Rural Development and Natural Resources. His previous public service included being a member of this home county's Parks and Recreation Commission.



Nebraska Sen. Victor Rountree

Victor Rountree's election to the Nebraska Legislature in 2024 has allowed him to continue his many decades of public service. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1980 to 2010, with postings around the world, and also is the founder and senior pastor of Endure to the End Ministries. Sen. Rountree served on four legislative committees this biennium: General Affairs, Judiciary, Urban Affairs, and State-Tribal Relations. He has become a leader in the Legislature on several measures to help individuals with disabilities.



Wisconsin Sen. Kelda Roys

Kelda Roys was elected to the Wisconsin Senate in 2021 after previously serving two terms in the Assembly (2009 to 2013). A small-business owner, attorney, and former nonprofit executive, Sen. Roys has championed numerous efforts to improve access to healthcare, improve services for rape victims, address child safety, and more. She served this biennium on Wisconsin's powerful Joint Committee on Finance, as well as on the Joint Committee on Review of Administrative Rules and the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety.



Iowa Sen. Art Staed

Art Staed was elected to his first term in the Iowa Senate in 2024 after serving in the House for 14 years. A longtime teacher, as a legislator, Sen. Staed has championed efforts to improve learning opportunities for young people and provide financial assistance to Iowa veterans in need. This biennium, he served on the following committees: Appropriations, Ethics, Natural Resources and Environment, State Government, and Technology.



North Dakota Sen. Desiree van Oosting

Desiree Van Oosting was first elected to the state Senate in 2024. During this legislative interim, she served as vice chair of the North Dakota Senate Health Care Committee. She was a member of the Human Services and Energy and Natural Resources committees this biennium. Her other legislative interim duties have included exploring issues related to rural health transformation and energy development and transmission. Sen. van Oosting is a small-business owner and a licensed and certified massage therapist.



Minnesota Rep. Nolan West

First elected to the Minnesota Legislature in 2016, Nolan West served this biennium as co-chair of the House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee. He also was a member of two other standing committees: Commerce Finance and Policy, and Ways and Means. Rep. West is the owner and operator of Best in the West Media, a media, videography, photography, and business consulting company.



Iowa Rep. Elizabeth Wilson

A small-business owner and longtime nonprofit leader, Elizabeth Wilson was first elected to the Iowa House in 2022. She served as assistant leader in her legislative caucus this biennium and was a member of these House legislative committees: Administration and Rules, Agriculture, Commerce, Economic Growth and Technology, Transportation, and Ways and Means. Outside the Legislature, she has served on her local school board and as treasurer of Families Helping Families of Iowa, which supports children in foster care.