

Prenatal Engagement and Family Support Working Group – Act 136 (H. 657)

October 15, 2026

Location: Zoom & Waterbury State Office Complex

Meeting Minutes (Draft, pending approval)

Members Present (all remote unless otherwise noted):

- Lauren Higbee, Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate
- Meghan Masterson, CHARM Team, KidsSafe Collaborative
- Raelyn Maynard, Individual with Lived Experience
- Katelyn Larose, Individual with Lived Experience
- Lindsay Barron, Designee, Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division
- Valerie Wood, Vermont Family Network
- Cammie Naylor, Vermont Legal Aid
- Jessica Barquist, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
- Kate Bailey, Voices for Vermont's Children
- Ilisa Stalberg, Department of Health's Maternal and Child Health Division
- Marshall Pahl, Office of the Defender General's Juvenile Division
- Alison Robinson, Recovery Partners Vermont
- Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner, Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division

Non-Members Present (all remote):

- Sarah Star, Attorney
- Angela Arsenault, State Representative
- Olivia Gieger, VT Digger
- Hannah Marble, Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division

Agenda:

1. Introductions & Establish Quorum 10min
2. Accept Agenda (including additions or deletions) 5min
3. 9/30/26 Meeting Minutes Acceptance (vote) 10min
4. Public Comment as necessary
5. Dr. Michelle Shepard 15min
6. Colorado "Red Letters or Red Alerts" Operation Memo (attached) 15min
7. Best for Babies/Safe Babies Presentation - Illuminate Colorado 25min
8. Additional Data and Information (if available) 15min
 - Judiciary data

- “Pregnancy Screen” ESD information
9. Report Draft outline & Solicitation of Written Ideas 30min

1. Introductions and Establishment of Quorum

- Members introduced themselves

2. Acceptance of Agenda

- The Working Group discussed the agenda and added a discussion of the report timeline. The addition was approved by unanimous consent.

3. Review and Approval of September 30, 2026, Meeting Minutes

- Meghan noted that the minutes from the September 30 meeting had not yet been distributed. Meghan moved to postpone approval of the minutes until the October 30 meeting. Cammie Naylor seconded the motion. There was no discussion, and the motion passed by unanimous consent.

4. Public Comment

- No public comments were provided.

5. Dr. Michelle Shepard

- Meghan noted the need to correct the spelling of Michelle’s name. Corrected and reflected in these notes.
- Meghan shared a recorded conversation and information from Dr. Michelle Shepherd, who was unable to attend the meeting in person but had agreed to participate through a recorded conversation.
- Jessica Barquist appreciated the discussion of supportive practices and emphasized the importance of prevention and access to services. She noted that she would have liked more information about mandated reporting and requested additional information about reporting practices.
- Marshall Pahl questioned whether the presentation addressed the Working Group’s specific charge, noting that members would likely agree with Dr. Shepherd’s emphasis on supportive practices but that the discussion did not directly address the questions before the group.
- Ilisa Stalberg noted that the lack of a tangible alternative to the pregnancy calendar presented a challenge and emphasized the need to consider what practices could replace it.
- Kate Bailey emphasized that the Working Group’s focus was on parenting decisions and DCF practices, rather than public health outcomes. She noted that the group had not heard compelling evidence that the calendar connects families with needed services. She also expressed concern that the

discussion was focused on justifying the calendar rather than examining its effectiveness and identifying alternatives. Kate observed that the broader system appeared to have significant gaps and noted that evaluating public health outcomes was outside the group's area of expertise.

- Cammie Naylor stated that she had not understood the Working Group to have reached consensus on its position regarding the calendar. She asked whether the group should establish a clear position on the calendar, identify alternatives, and develop recommendations to support pregnant individuals. Cammie raised concerns about the calendar as a potential violation of privacy and due process rights and asked whether the group should recommend that reports resulting from the practice be dismissed for lack of jurisdiction. She also discussed the possibility of notifying individuals about the practice.
- Marshall questioned whether consensus alone would be sufficient and emphasized the need to understand the legal authority for maintaining the calendar.
- The Working Group also discussed DCF's practice of holding reports that are not accepted in pendency (generalized statement of "Working Group" as multiple members spoke to the same question). Members asked questions about the nature of this practice and whether it was specific to pregnant individuals. Lindsay explained that the retention of unaccepted reports is a broader records-retention issue that applies to children of all ages. She noted that DCF is working with the Agency of Human Services and the Legislature to consider appropriate records-retention practices in connection with the anticipated CCWIS system. She also discussed the potential value of retaining reports to identify patterns of chronic neglect or serious physical injury. Marshall shared that he disagreed with this being framed as a records retention issue.

Motion: Request for a Legal Memorandum from DCF

- Lauren moved to request a written legal memorandum from DCF, "To request a legal memo from DCF of their analysis of statutory authority to keep a high-risk pregnancy calendar and the practice of holding reports that are not accepted in pendency."
- The motion was revised to clarify the requested scope. Jessica Barquist seconded the motion.
- Aryka requested a roll-call vote. The motion passed with nine votes in favor, no votes opposed, and one abstention. Raelyn Maynard did not vote.

Roll-call vote:

- **In favor:** Lauren Higbee, Valerie Wood, Cammie Naylor, Jessica Barquist, Alison Robinson, Ilisa Stalberg, Meghan Masterson, Marshall Pahl, and Katelyn Larose.
- **Abstained:** Aryka Radke.
- **Absent:** Larry Crist and Kate Bailey.
- **Did not vote:** Raelyn Maynard.
- Conversation occurred surrounding non-lawyers (raised by Valerie) interpreting legal information. Meghan shared that she feels similar, but that she can identify if she supports the practice or not. Cammie shared that non-lawyers can still read the law, interpret their position, and noted that everyone was carefully chosen to be on this group. Marshall was asked to conduct his own independent legal analysis.

6. Information from Individuals with Lived Experience (Non-agenda item)

- Katelyn Larose shared her experience of being included on the high-risk pregnancy calendar during her second pregnancy. She described experiencing anxiety and uncertainty about whether she would be able to bring her child home. She stated that, despite never testing positive for drugs, she experienced intensive monitoring and restrictions surrounding her child's birth. She expressed concern about the impact of these practices on mothers and families.
- Members acknowledged the importance of hearing and recognizing the experiences of individuals directly affected by the practices under review.

Motion: Formal Acknowledgement of Members Sharing Lived Experience

- Meghan motioned to formally thank Katelyn Larose and Raelyn Maynard for sharing their stories and contributing their expertise and experiences to the Working Group. The motion passed by unanimous consent.
- Meghan emphasized the importance of listening to members' stories as personal experiences, in addition to formally recognizing their contributions through the Working Group's process as a legislatively created body. Many other group members thanked Katelyn in the chat.

Motion: Extend the Working Group

- The Working Group discussed the need for additional meeting time to complete its work and develop its report. Lauren reported that the committees of jurisdiction were agreeable to extending the timeline and allowing additional meetings. DCF has agreed to continue to pay per-diem.
- Lauren made a motion to extend the Prenatal Engagement and Family Support Working Group for an additional three Working Group meetings. Valerie Wood seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

Motion: Extend the Report Submission Deadline

- Lauren made a motion to extend the deadline for submitting the Working Group's report to the committees of jurisdiction to February 1, 2027. Meghan Masterson seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

7. Colorado "Red Letters or Red Alerts" Operation Memo

- The Colorado "Red Letters or Red Alerts" operation memorandum was not discussed in the working group's session.

8. Best for Babies/ Safe Babies Presentation – Illuminate Colorado

- The planned presentation from Illuminate Colorado was postponed because the presenters were unavailable.
- Valerie Wood asked whether a recorded training or other informational materials were available. The presentation was deferred to a future meeting.

9. Additional Data and Information, Including Judiciary Data

- The Working Group received an update on its request for Judiciary data. The Judiciary had received the request and was working to provide publicly shareable data, including information about the ages of children at the time of removal, measured in days.
- Lauren shared information from the Economic Services Division (posted on the website) regarding the "pregnancy screen."
- Aryka shared that an MOU is being discussed between ESD and FSD.
- Members discussed the practice of checking other systems to obtain pregnancy due dates. Lauren shared that she had consulted counterparts and legal partners and that the practice had raised concerns. The discussion included questions about protections applicable to information held by the Agency of Human Services and noted that other jurisdictions had discontinued similar practices.

10. Report Draft Outline and Solicitation of Written Ideas

- The Working Group added a discussion of the report timeline to the agenda. Members discussed the need for additional time to complete the Working Group's review and develop its recommendations.

The meeting adjourned.