

Minnesota Supreme Court Council on Child Protection and Maltreatment Prevention

Erin Johnson, Assistant Washington County Attorney III
Judy Nord, Sr. Staff Attorney, State Court Administration

Minnesota Judicial Branch

Minnesota Department of Human Services

CJI

Children's Justice Initiative

To ensure that children who have experienced abuse and neglect attain safe, stable, permanent homes and improved well-being.

CJI Mission Statement

Legislation and Supreme Court Order

- Authorizing Legislation
– May 2024
- Supreme Court Order –
August 2024
- Part of Minnesota's
Court Improvement
Program known as the
Children's Justice
Initiative



Council Purpose



- To develop a comprehensive blueprint to improve Minnesota's child protection system and prevent unnecessary entry of children and families into the system

Council Structure - Membership

- Statewide, multidisciplinary membership
- Parents and youth with lived experience, judges, county attorneys, attorneys for parents and children, guardians ad litem, social workers, tribal representatives



Council Structure – Membership (cont'd)

- Law enforcement officers, pediatricians, foster youth ombudsperson, peer recovery specialists, youth life coaches, county commissioner, educators, chemical health and mental health services providers for adults and children



Council Structure - Meetings

- Timeframe: Council meets from August 2024 through January 2026
- Evening meetings held twice per month for three hours per meeting – 15 Council meetings held so far



Focus on Children



- Preventing child abuse and neglect
- Preventing unnecessary entry of children and families into the system
- Improving existing child protection system

Initial Presentations to Council

- Presentations on key topics to ensure all Council members fully understand scope of child welfare system, social services processes, and court process
- Examined prevention, early intervention, removal, reunification, and permanency



Identification of Issues, Concerns, and Challenges



- Council discussions following each of the presentations resulted in identification of issues, concerns, and challenges
- 12 pages of concerns – more will be identified through focus groups and surveys

Identification of Issues, Concerns, and Challenges



- **Examples of Concerns**

- Communities need to be involved in maltreatment prevention efforts
- Children moved from school to school or foster placement to foster placement
- Not enough court hearing time to fully discuss critical issues
- SSIS severely outdated

Identification of Issues, Concerns, and Challenges



- **Examples of Concerns – Workforce Issues**
 - Lack of people to do the work (social workers, attorneys, mental health and chemical health service providers)
 - Significant turnover in many sectors – social workers, attorneys
 - Inconsistent or lack of training across all stakeholder groups

Identification of Issues, Concerns, and Challenges



- **Examples of Concerns – Funding**
 - Property taxes shouldn't be the main source of funding for child protection
 - Variation in county property tax bases result in unequal treatment of children and families across counties

Identification of Issues, Concerns, and Challenges



- **Examples of Concerns – Lack of Resources, including:**
 - Services to help families who are doing their best to protect their children
 - Affordable, stable housing for many low-income families
 - Help for single parents who can't afford daycare
 - Mental health and chemical health treatment facilities

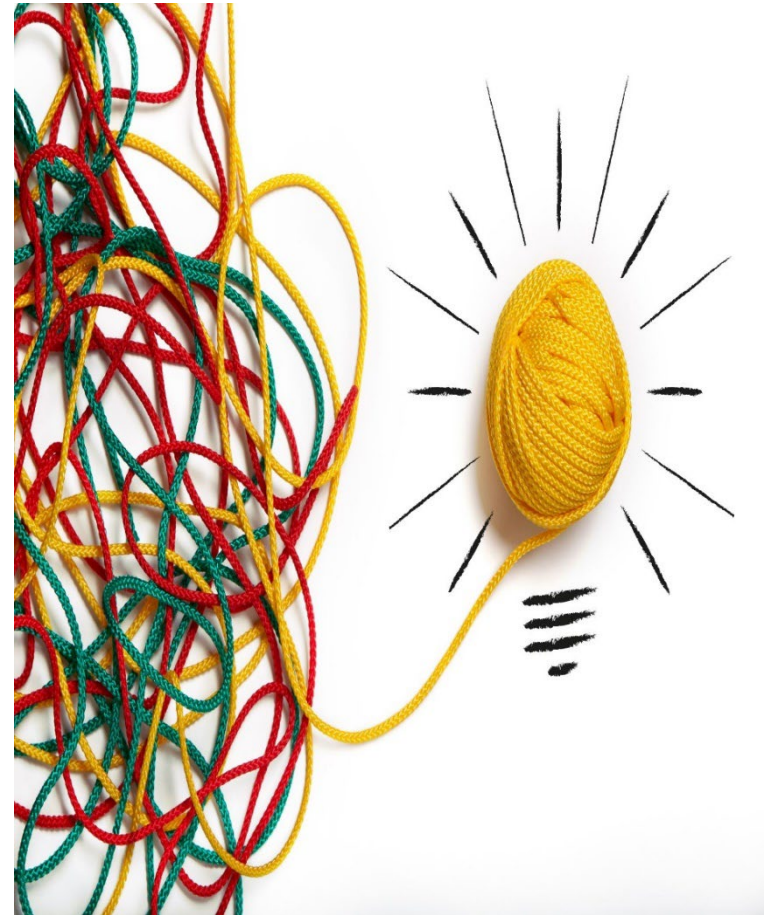
Six Focus Areas

- Issues, concerns and challenges were organized into six key focus areas
 - Maltreatment prevention
 - Child well-being
 - Court processes and procedures
 - Social services processes and procedures
 - Workforce development
 - Funding systems



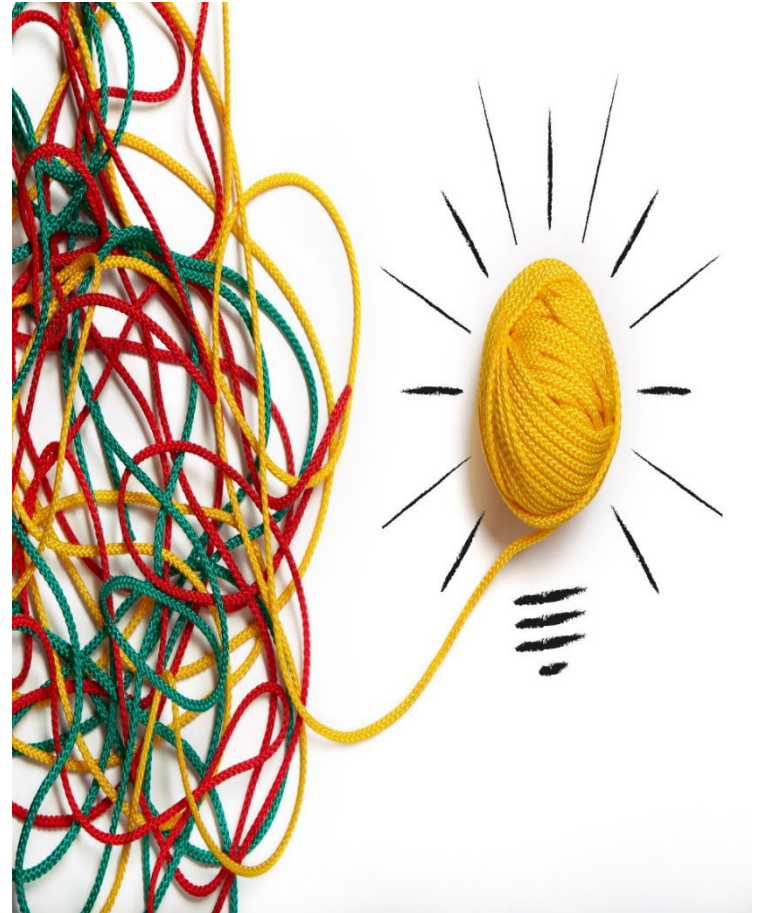
Exploring Promising Practices and Potential Solutions

- **Solutions: Prevention of Maltreatment**
 - Family Resource Centers
 - Involvement of the community
 - Supportive living environments for families
 - Hospital to home programs



Exploring Promising Practices and Potential Solutions

- **Solutions: Improving the Child Protection System**
 - Consistent high-quality training for all stakeholders
 - Define parent and party/participant in court process
 - Ensure early legal representation for parents and children
 - Resources for foster youth aging out of the system



Focus Groups



- In process of convening focus groups to gather information from communities and validate existing and identify any additional:
 - issues, concerns, and challenges
 - promising practices and potential solutions
- Geographic, racial, gender diversity

Focus Groups - Categories



- **16 focus groups**
 - Tribal communities
 - Cultural community leaders (Black/African American, Latino, Asian Pacific)
 - Religious and spiritual community leaders
 - Foster parents and providers
 - Law enforcement
 - Parents and youth with lived child protection experience
 - Youth-serving organizations
 - Social workers
 - GALs
 - Mandated reporters

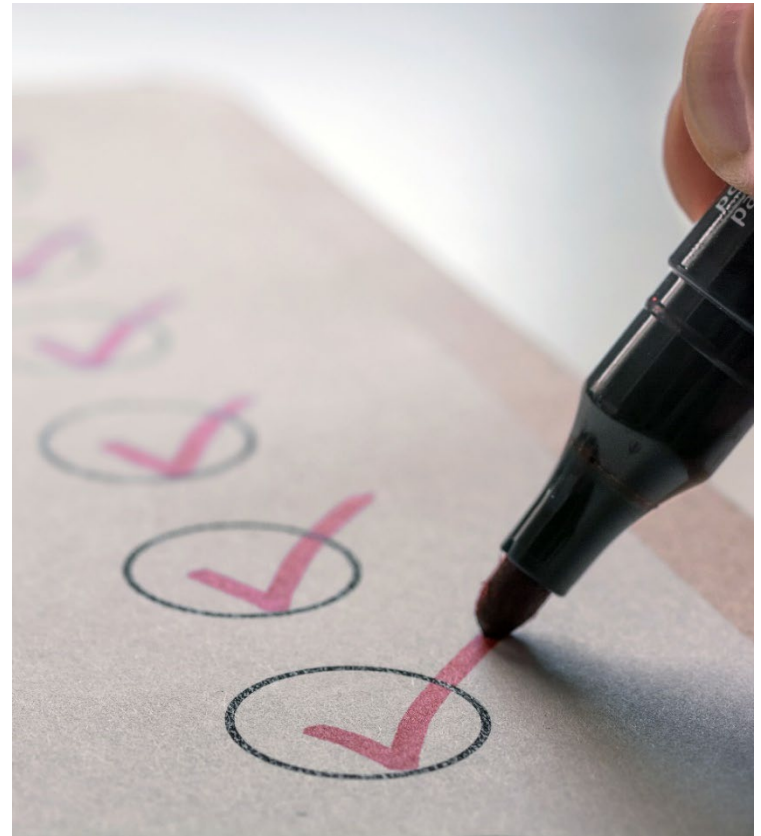
Focus Groups - Questions



- **Questions – similar for each group**
 - What could be done to help prevent child maltreatment and prevent families from entering the child protection system?
 - What improvements are needed in the child protection system?
 - What are the strengths of the system?
 - What in the system could be improved?
 - Thinking back to the training you received, was it sufficient? What additional training should be implemented?

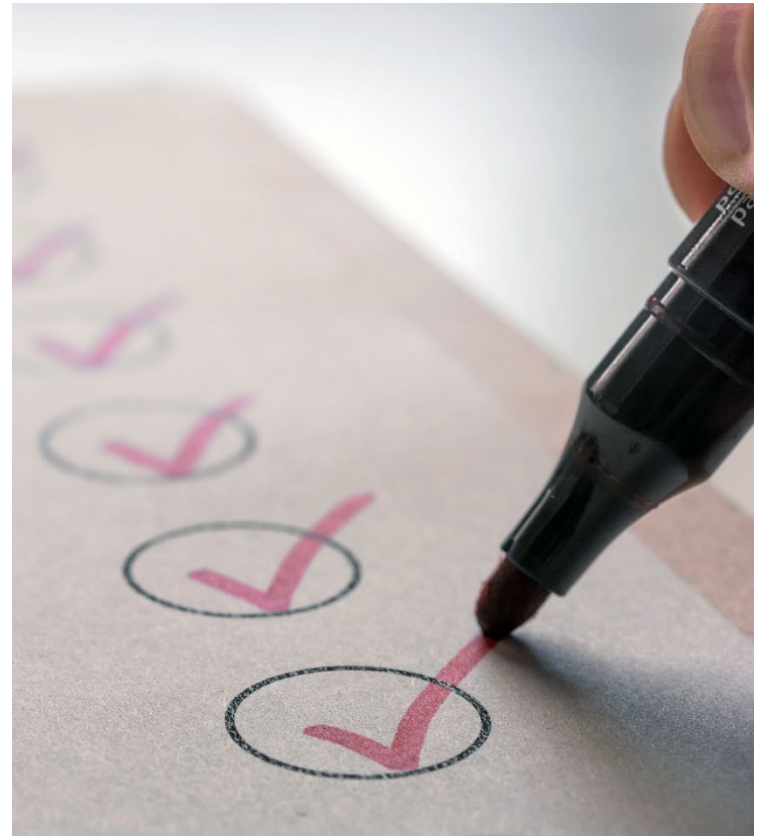
Surveys to Community at Large

- Surveys will be sent to 15 constituency groups statewide
 - County commissioners
 - Social services directors
 - Social workers
 - Mental health and chemical health treatment providers
 - Judges
 - County attorneys
 - Attorneys for parents and children
 - Court administration
 - Guardians ad litem



Surveys to Community at Large (cont'd)

- In the surveys, constituents will be asked to rate their level of agreement with identified challenges and solutions
- Opportunity to add other challenges and solutions



Updates and Reports



- **Status Updates**
 - January 2025
 - March 2025
- **Progress Report:** July 15, 2025
- **Final Report:** January 15, 2026

Questions

