



Ohio Revised Code

Section 121.37 Ohio family and children first cabinet council.

Effective: September 30, 2025

Legislation: House Bill 96

(A)(1) There is hereby created the Ohio family and children first cabinet council. The council shall be composed of the director of education and workforce, the executive director of the opportunities for Ohioans with disabilities agency, the medicaid director, and the directors of youth services, job and family services, behavioral health, health, developmental disabilities, aging, rehabilitation and correction, children and youth, and budget and management. The chairperson of the council shall be the governor or the governor's designee and shall establish procedures for the council's internal control and management.

The purpose of the cabinet council is to help families seeking government services. This section shall not be interpreted or applied to usurp the role of parents, but solely to streamline and coordinate existing government services for families seeking assistance for their children.

(2) In seeking to fulfill its purpose, the council may do any of the following:

(a) Advise and make recommendations to the governor and general assembly regarding the provision of services to children;

(b) Advise and assess local governments on the coordination of service delivery to children;

(c) Hold meetings at such times and places as may be prescribed by the council's procedures and maintain records of the meetings, except that records identifying individual children are confidential and shall be disclosed only as provided by law;

(d) Develop programs and projects, including pilot projects, to encourage coordinated efforts at the state and local level to improve the state's social service delivery system;

(e) Enter into contracts with and administer grants to county family and children first councils, as well as other county or multicounty organizations to plan and coordinate service delivery between



state agencies and local service providers for families and children;

(f) Enter into contracts with and apply for grants from federal agencies or private organizations;

(g) Enter into interagency agreements to encourage coordinated efforts at the state and local level to improve the state's social service delivery system. The agreements may include provisions regarding the receipt, transfer, and expenditure of funds;

(h) Identify public and private funding sources for services provided to alleged or adjudicated unruly children and children who are at risk of being alleged or adjudicated unruly children, including regulations governing access to and use of the services;

(i) Collect information provided by local communities regarding successful programs for prevention, intervention, and treatment of unruly behavior, including evaluations of the programs;

(j) Identify and disseminate publications regarding alleged or adjudicated unruly children and children who are at risk of being alleged or adjudicated unruly children and regarding programs serving those types of children;

(k) Maintain an inventory of strategic planning facilitators for use by government or nonprofit entities that serve alleged or adjudicated unruly children or children who are at risk of being alleged or adjudicated unruly children.

(3) The cabinet council shall provide for the following:

(a) Reviews of service and treatment plans for children for which such reviews are requested;

(b) Assistance as the council determines to be necessary to meet the needs of children referred by county family and children first councils;

(c) Monitoring and supervision of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multi-disciplinary, interagency system for infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities or delays and their families, as established pursuant to federal grants received and administered by the department of



children and youth for early intervention services under the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004," 118 Stat. 2744, 20 U.S.C.A. 1400, as amended;

(d) Establishing and maintaining the Ohio automated service coordination system pursuant to section 121.376 of the Revised Code.

(4) The cabinet council shall develop and implement the following:

(a) An interagency process to select the indicators that will be used to measure progress toward increasing child well-being in the state and to update the indicators on an annual basis.

(b) An interagency system to offer guidance and monitor progress toward increasing child well-being in the state and in each county;

(c) An annual plan that identifies state-level agency efforts taken to ensure progress towards increasing child well-being in the state;

(d) A state appeals process to resolve disputes among the members of a county council, established under division (B) of this section, concerning whether reasonable responsibilities are being shared. The appeals process may be accessed only by a majority vote of the council members who are required to serve on the council. Upon appeal, the cabinet council may order that state funds for services to children and families be redirected to a county's board of county commissioners.

(5) On an annual basis, the cabinet council shall submit to the governor and the general assembly a report on the status of efforts to increase child well-being in the state. This report shall be made available to any other person on request.

(6) The cabinet council state office may adopt rules governing the responsibilities of county family and children first councils established in division (B)(5) of this section.

(B)(1) Except as provided in division (B)(2) of this section, each board of county commissioners shall establish a county family and children first council. The board may invite any local public or private agency or group that funds, advocates, or provides services to children and families to have a



representative become a permanent or temporary member of its county council. Each county council must include the following individuals:

- (a) At least three individuals whose families are receiving or have received services from an agency represented on the council or another county's council. If such an individual is employed by an agency represented on the council, the individual shall complete a conflict of interest disclosure form and abstain from any vote that involves the agency that employs the individual. Where possible, the number of members representing families may be equal to twenty per cent of the council's membership.
- (b) The director of the board of alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services that serves the county, or, in the case of a county that has a board of alcohol and drug addiction services and a community mental health board, the directors of both boards. If a board of alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services covers more than one county, the director may designate a person to participate on the county's council.
- (c) The health commissioner, or the commissioner's designee, of the board of health of each city and general health district in the county. If the county has two or more health districts, the health commissioner membership may be limited to the commissioners of the two districts with the largest populations.
- (d) The director of the county department of job and family services;
- (e) The executive director of the public children services agency;
- (f) The superintendent of the county board of developmental disabilities or, if the superintendent serves as superintendent of more than one county board of developmental disabilities, the superintendent's designee;
- (g) The superintendent of the city, exempted village, or local school district with the largest number of pupils residing in the county, or a district-level administrative designee with decision-making authority, as determined by the department of education and workforce, which shall notify each board of county commissioners of its determination at least biennially;



- (h) A school superintendent representing all other school districts with territory in the county, or a district-level administrative designee with decision-making authority, as designated at a biennial meeting of the superintendents of those districts;
- (i) A representative of the municipal corporation with the largest population in the county;
- (j) The president of the board of county commissioners or an individual designated by the board;
- (k) A representative of the department of youth services or an individual designated by the department;
- (l) A representative of the county's head start agencies, as defined in section 3301.32 of the Revised Code;
- (m) A representative of the county's early intervention collaborative established pursuant to the federal early intervention program operated under the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004";
- (n) A representative of a local nonprofit entity that funds, advocates, or provides services to children and families.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the public members of a county council are not prohibited from serving on the council and making decisions regarding the duties of the council, including those involving the funding of joint projects and those outlined in the county's service coordination mechanism implemented pursuant to division (C) of this section.

The county's juvenile court judge senior in service or another judge of the juvenile court designated by the administrative judge or, where there is no administrative judge, by the judge senior in service shall serve as the judicial advisor to the county family and children first council. The judge may advise the county council on the court's utilization of resources, services, or programs provided by the entities represented by the members of the county council and how those resources, services, or programs assist the court in its administration of justice. Service of a judge as a judicial advisor



pursuant to this section is a judicial function.

(2) By passing a resolution, a board of county commissioners may decide not to establish or maintain a county family and children first council for the county if the board determines that all of the following conditions exist:

(a) Alternative programs and services exist in the county to meet the needs of those served by a family and children first council.

(b) A family and children first council for the county is not or would not be sufficiently funded to make the council financially sustainable.

(c) The director of the county department of job and family services, executive director of the public children services agency, and county board of developmental disabilities each recommend to the board of county commissioners not to establish or maintain a county family and children first council.

(3) A county's board of county commissioners that has decided to not establish or maintain a county family and children first council may reconsider the decision at any time but shall do so not later than five years after the date the resolution passed. In reconsidering the decision, the board of county commissioners shall determine whether all the conditions described in division (B)(2) of this section exist.

(4) The purpose of the county council is to streamline and coordinate existing government services for families seeking services for their children. In seeking to fulfill its purpose, a county council shall provide for the following:

(a) Referrals to the cabinet council of those children for whom the county council cannot provide adequate services;

(b) Development and implementation of a process that annually evaluates and prioritizes services, fills service gaps where possible, and invents new approaches to achieve better results for families and children;



(c) Participation in the development of a countywide, comprehensive, coordinated, multi-disciplinary, interagency system for infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities or delays and their families, as established pursuant to federal grants received and administered by the department of children and youth for early intervention services under the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004";

(d) Maintenance of an accountability system to monitor the county council's progress in achieving results for families and children;

(e) Establishment of a mechanism to ensure ongoing input from a broad representation of families who are receiving services within the county system.

(5) A county council shall develop and implement the following:

(a) An interagency process to establish local indicators and monitor the county's progress toward increasing child well-being in the county;

(b) An interagency process to identify local priorities to increase child well-being.

(c) An annual plan that identifies the county's interagency efforts to increase child well-being in the county.

On an annual basis, the county council shall submit a report on the status of efforts by the county to increase child well-being in the county to the county's board of county commissioners and the cabinet council. This report shall be made available to any other person on request.

(6)(a) Except as provided in division (B)(6)(b) of this section, a county council shall comply with the policies, procedures, and activities prescribed by the rules or interagency agreements of a state department participating on the cabinet council whenever the county council performs a function subject to those rules or agreements.

(b) On application of a county council, the cabinet council may grant an exemption from any rules or



interagency agreements of a state department participating on the council if an exemption is necessary for the council to implement an alternative program or approach for service delivery to families and children. The application shall describe the proposed program or approach and specify the rules or interagency agreements from which an exemption is necessary. The cabinet council shall approve or disapprove the application in accordance with standards and procedures it shall adopt. If an application is approved, the exemption is effective only while the program or approach is being implemented, including a reasonable period during which the program or approach is being evaluated for effectiveness.

(7)(a) Each county council shall designate an administrative agent for the council from among the following public entities: the board of alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services, including a board of alcohol and drug addiction or a community mental health board if the county is served by separate boards; the board of county commissioners; any board of health of the county's city and general health districts; the county department of job and family services; the county agency responsible for the administration of children services pursuant to section 5153.15 of the Revised Code; the county board of developmental disabilities; any of the county's boards of education or governing boards of educational service centers; or the county's juvenile court. Any of the foregoing public entities, other than the board of county commissioners, may decline to serve as the council's administrative agent.

A county council's administrative agent shall serve as the council's appointing authority for any employees of the council. The council shall file an annual budget with its administrative agent, with copies filed with the county auditor and with the board of county commissioners, unless the board is serving as the council's administrative agent. The council's administrative agent shall ensure that all expenditures are handled in accordance with policies, procedures, and activities prescribed by state departments in rules, grant agreements, or interagency agreements that are applicable to the council's functions.

The administrative agent of a county council may send notice of a member's absence if a member listed in division (B)(1) of this section has been absent from either three consecutive meetings of the county council or a county council subcommittee, or from one-quarter of such meetings in a calendar year, whichever is less. The notice shall be sent to the board of county commissioners that establishes the county council and, for the members listed in divisions (B)(1)(b), (c), (e), and (l) of



this section, to the governing board overseeing the respective entity; for the member listed in division (B)(1)(f) of this section, to the county board of developmental disabilities that employs the superintendent; for a member listed in division (B)(1)(g) or (h) of this section, to the school board that employs the superintendent; for the member listed in division (B)(1)(i) of this section, to the mayor of the municipal corporation; for the member listed in division (B)(1)(k) of this section, to the director of youth services; and for the member listed in division (B)(1)(n) of this section, to that member's board of trustees.

The administrative agent for a county council may do any of the following on behalf of the council:

- (i) Enter into agreements or administer contracts with public or private entities to fulfill specific council business. Such agreements and contracts are exempt from the competitive bidding requirements of section 307.86 of the Revised Code if they have been approved by the county council and they are for the purchase of services for families and children. The approval of the county council is not required to exempt agreements or contracts entered into under section 5139.34, 5139.41, or 5139.43 of the Revised Code from the competitive bidding requirements of section 307.86 of the Revised Code.
 - (ii) As determined by the council, provide financial stipends, reimbursements, or both, to family representatives for expenses related to council activity;
 - (iii) Receive by gift, grant, devise, or bequest any moneys, lands, or other property for the purposes for which the council is established. The agent shall hold, apply, and dispose of the moneys, lands, or other property according to the terms of the gift, grant, devise, or bequest. Any interest or earnings shall be treated in the same manner and are subject to the same terms as the gift, grant, devise, or bequest from which it accrues.
- (b)(i) If the county council designates the board of county commissioners as its administrative agent, the board may, by resolution, delegate any of its powers and duties as administrative agent to an executive committee the board establishes from the membership of the county council. The board shall name to the executive committee at least the individuals described in divisions (B)(1)(b) to (h) of this section and may appoint the president of the board or another individual as the chair of the executive committee. The executive committee must include at least one family county council



representative who does not have a family member employed by an agency represented on the council.

(ii) The executive committee may, with the approval of the board, hire an executive director to assist the county council in administering its powers and duties. The executive director shall serve in the unclassified civil service at the pleasure of the executive committee. The executive director may, with the approval of the executive committee, hire other employees as necessary to properly conduct the county council's business.

(iii) The board may require the executive committee to submit an annual budget to the board for approval and may amend or repeal the resolution that delegated to the executive committee its authority as the county council's administrative agent.

(8) Two or more county councils may enter into an agreement to administer their county councils jointly by creating a regional family and children first council. A regional council possesses the same duties and authority possessed by a county council, except that the duties and authority apply regionally rather than to individual counties. Prior to entering into an agreement to create a regional council, the members of each county council to be part of the regional council shall meet to determine whether all or part of the members of each county council will serve as members of the regional council.

(9) A board of county commissioners may approve a resolution by a majority vote of the board's members that requires the county council to submit a statement to the board each time the council proposes to enter into an agreement, adopt a plan, or make a decision, other than a decision pursuant to section 121.38 of the Revised Code, that requires the expenditure of funds for two or more families. The statement shall describe the proposed agreement, plan, or decision.

Not later than fifteen days after the board receives the statement, it shall, by resolution approved by a majority of its members, approve or disapprove the agreement, plan, or decision. Failure of the board to pass a resolution during that time period shall be considered approval of the agreement, plan, or decision.

An agreement, plan, or decision for which a statement is required to be submitted to the board shall



be implemented only if it is approved by the board.

(C) Each county shall develop a county service coordination mechanism. The county service coordination mechanism shall serve as the guiding document for coordination of services in the county. For children who also receive services under the early intervention program, the main provider of service coordination shall be an early intervention service coordinator to ensure compliance with section 5180.30 of the Revised Code. All family service coordination plans shall be developed in accordance with the county service coordination mechanism. The mechanism shall be developed and approved with the participation of the county entities representing child welfare; developmental disabilities; alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services; health; juvenile judges; education; the county family and children first council; and the county early intervention collaborative established pursuant to the federal early intervention program operated under the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004." The county shall establish an implementation schedule for the mechanism. The cabinet council may monitor the implementation and administration of each county's service coordination mechanism.

Each mechanism shall include all of the following:

- (1) A procedure for an agency, including a juvenile court, or a family voluntarily seeking service coordination, to refer the child and family to the county council for service coordination in accordance with the mechanism;
- (2) A procedure ensuring that a family and all appropriate staff from involved agencies, including a representative from the appropriate school district, are notified of and invited to participate in all family service coordination plan meetings;
- (3) A procedure that permits a family to initiate a meeting to develop or review the family's service coordination plan and allows the family to invite a family advocate, mentor, or support person of the family's choice to participate in any such meeting;
- (4) A procedure for ensuring that a family service coordination plan meeting is conducted for each child who receives service coordination under the mechanism and for whom an emergency out-of-home placement has been made or for whom a nonemergency out-of-home placement is being



considered. The meeting shall be conducted within ten days of an emergency out-of-home placement. The meeting shall be conducted before a nonemergency out-of-home placement. The family service coordination plan shall outline how the county council members will jointly pay for services, where applicable, and provide services in the least restrictive environment.

(5) A procedure for monitoring the progress and tracking the outcomes of each service coordination plan requested in the county including monitoring and tracking children in out-of-home placements to assure continued progress, appropriateness of placement, and continuity of care after discharge from placement with appropriate arrangements for housing, treatment, and education;

(6) A procedure for protecting the confidentiality of all personal family information disclosed during service coordination meetings or contained in the comprehensive family service coordination plan;

(7) A procedure for assessing the needs and strengths of any child or family that has been referred to the council for service coordination, including a child whose parent or custodian is voluntarily seeking services, and for ensuring that parents and custodians are afforded the opportunity to participate;

(8) A procedure for development of a family service coordination plan described in division (D) of this section;

(9) A local dispute resolution process to serve as the process that must be used first to resolve disputes among the agencies represented on the county council concerning the provision of services to children, including children who are abused, neglected, dependent, unruly, alleged unruly, or delinquent children and under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and children whose parents or custodians are voluntarily seeking services. The local dispute resolution process shall comply with sections 121.38, 121.381, and 121.382 of the Revised Code. The local dispute resolution process shall be used to resolve disputes between a child's parents or custodians and the county council regarding service coordination. The county council shall inform the parents or custodians of their right to use the dispute resolution process. Parents or custodians shall use existing local agency grievance procedures to address disputes not involving service coordination. The dispute resolution process is in addition to and does not replace other rights or procedures that parents or custodians may have under other sections of the Revised Code.



The cabinet council shall adopt rules in accordance with Chapter 119. of the Revised Code establishing an administrative review process to address problems that arise concerning the operation of a local dispute resolution process.

Nothing in division (C)(4) of this section shall be interpreted as overriding or affecting decisions of a juvenile court or public children services agency regarding an out-of-home placement, long-term placement, or emergency out-of-home placement.

(D) Each county shall develop a family service coordination plan that does all of the following:

(1) Designates service responsibilities among the various state and local agencies that provide services to children and their families, including children who are abused, neglected, dependent, unruly, or delinquent children and under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and children whose parents or custodians are voluntarily seeking services;

(2) Designates an individual, approved by the family, to track the progress of the family service coordination plan, schedule reviews as necessary, and facilitate the family service coordination plan meeting process;

(3) Ensures that assistance and services to be provided are responsive to the strengths and needs of the family, as well as the family's culture, race, and ethnic group, by allowing the family to offer information and suggestions and participate in decisions. Identified assistance and services shall be provided in the least restrictive environment possible.

(4) Includes a process for dealing with a child who is alleged to be an unruly child. The process shall include methods to divert the child from the juvenile court system;

(5) Includes timelines for completion of goals specified in the plan with regular reviews scheduled to monitor progress toward those goals;

(6) Includes a plan for dealing with short-term crisis situations and safety concerns.



(E)(1) The process provided for under division (D)(4) of this section may include, but is not limited to, the following:

(a) Designation of the person or agency to conduct the assessment of the child and the child's family as described in division (C)(7) of this section and designation of the instrument or instruments to be used to conduct the assessment;

(b) An emphasis on the personal responsibilities of the child and the parental responsibilities of the parents, guardian, or custodian of the child;

(c) Involvement of local law enforcement agencies and officials.

(2) The method to divert a child from the juvenile court system that must be included in the service coordination process may include, but is not limited to, the following:

(a) The preparation of a complaint under section 2151.27 of the Revised Code alleging that the child is an unruly child and notifying the child and the parents, guardian, or custodian that the complaint has been prepared to encourage the child and the parents, guardian, or custodian to comply with other methods to divert the child from the juvenile court system;

(b) Conducting a meeting with the child, the parents, guardian, or custodian, and other interested parties to determine the appropriate methods to divert the child from the juvenile court system;

(c) A method to provide to the child and the child's family a short-term respite from a short-term crisis situation involving a confrontation between the child and the parents, guardian, or custodian;

(d) A program to provide a mentor to the child or the parents, guardian, or custodian;

(e) A program to provide parenting education to the parents, guardian, or custodian;

(f) An alternative school program for children who are truant from school, repeatedly disruptive in school, or suspended or expelled from school;



(g) Other appropriate measures, including, but not limited to, any alternative methods to divert a child from the juvenile court system that are identified by the Ohio family and children first cabinet council.

(F) Each county may review and revise the service coordination process described in division (D) of this section based on the availability of funds under Title IV-A of the "Social Security Act," 110 Stat. 2113 (1996), 42 U.S.C.A. 601, as amended, or to the extent resources are available from any other federal, state, or local funds.

(G) As used in this section, "early intervention service coordinator" means a person who holds an early intervention service coordinator credential or an early intervention service coordination supervisor credential issued by the department of children and youth and who assists and enables an infant or toddler with a developmental delay or disability and the child's family to receive the services and rights, including procedural safeguards, required under part C of the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004," 20 U.S.C. 1400, as amended.