

ICJC Sex Crimes Prevention Subcommittee – Regular Meeting

July 9, 2026 @ 11:00 a.m.

Meeting Minutes - DRAFT

Meeting Location: Office of the Idaho State Appellate Public Defender, 322 E. Front St., Suite 570, Boise, Idaho

Subcommittee Co-Chairs:

Erik Lehtinen, Director, Office of the State Appellate Public Defender

Tracy Basterrechea, Chief, Meridian Police Department

Members Present (11):

Erik Lehtinen

Trina Allen

Jen Rupe

John Dinger

Roger Sherman

Dr. Megan Smith

Cassie Graham

Collin Elias

Jean Fisher

Anthony Henry

Molly Kaczmarek (for

Jean Fitzgerald-Mutchie)

Members Not Present (6):

Tracy Basterrechea

Dr. Laura King

Elizabeth Spenner

Scott Rowley

Aleshea Boals

Stu Hobson

Other Attendees (3):

Jessica Ruehrwein

Elizabeth Todd

Meeting Agenda:

1. Introduction of new SCPS members

Jessica Ruehrwein introduced herself. Jessica is attending to discuss Lutheran Community Services Northwest's Safe Families for Children Program.

Molly Kaczmarek is participating today on behalf of Jean Fitzgerald-Mutchie, who has an ongoing scheduling conflict with subcommittee meetings. It is unknown whether Molly will be the one to permanently replace Jean.

Cassie Graham and Jen Rupe, new members of the committee, introduced themselves. Cassie is with IDHW and will be taking Ivie Smart's seat on the committee. Jen will be representing the Idaho Attorney General's Office. The committee previously had a member that was the ICAC Education Specialist at the Idaho Attorney General's Office, but that position is now vacant. When that position is filled, both Jen and the ICAC Education Specialist will be members of the committee.

Chair Lehtinen told the committee that Dr. Laura King was unable to be present for today's meeting but will be taking Dr. Lisa Bostaph's place due to Dr. Bostaph's ongoing scheduling conflict.

2. Recap of June 4, 2026, meeting

Chair Lehtinen recapped the previous meeting since a majority of members were unable to attend. The group discussed the presentation at the May 29, 2026, Idaho Criminal Justice Commission (ICJC) meeting. Moving forward, it is still up to this subcommittee to determine the direction/area of focus. Members of the group agreed that they still need more information before this committee can make a decision on the direction. To gain more information, the committee will continue to have presentations.

3. Approval of April 30, 2026, and June 4, 2026, regular meeting minutes

Jen Rupe moved to approve the April 30, 2026, and June 4, 2026, minutes, seconded by Dr. Megan Smith. The motion passed.

4. Presentation and discussion: Safe Families for Children Program (Jessica Ruehrwein, with Lutheran Community Services Northwest)

Jessica Ruehrwein presented on Lutheran Community Services Northwest's Safe Families for Children Program.

It was explained that Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW) is a nonprofit organization with an overall mission of partnering for health, justice, and hope. LCSNW has 30 district offices in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and eight lines of service. Different locations have different focuses. For example, the Spokane, Washington office

is focused on human trafficking and the Tacoma, Washington office is focused on elderly services and dementia.

LCSNW's newest location in Boise, Idaho opened in 2019. The Boise location's focus is prevention by helping families before crisis. Jessica and her team work with churches and other community members to coach and help families.

Safe Families for Children was defined as a program that focuses on mobilizing community to keep children safe and families together. The program was founded in Chicago in 2003 and there are 30 states with Safe Families in place. Safe Families is evidence based. The Safe Families for Children program has expanded internationally in Africa, Canada, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

The Safe Families for Children's mission is to keep children safe to prevent the need for foster care, and to support parents to strengthen families with compassionate community and resources and keep families together to minimize trauma and restore hope. The program aims to serve families who lack support and face challenges such as single parenting, lack of childcare, mental health challenges, housing insecurity, grief, domestic violence, financial stress, divorce, unemployment, medical needs, and more.

Examples of what the Safe Families for Children program has done in the community were provided. The program provides temporary care for children in approved volunteer homes, coaching and mentoring for parents to find the next steps, a network of relationships and support to help parents stabilize, assistance navigating community resources.

LCSNW works with volunteers to make the Safe Families for Children program possible. Most are members of a church but that is not a requirement. It was emphasized that there are a lot of volunteer opportunities. Some people don't want to take on any childcare related roles but there are a lot of little things and ways to help.

The group discussed whether LCSNW uses CarePortal and what it entails. A member explained what the CarePortal is and how it can be used. An example of a CarePortal request was provided.

It was noted that LCSNW often handles the last-minute requests that are difficult to obtain. An example of a difficult last-minute request was provided.

Statistics regarding why the Safe Families for Children program matters were presented to the group. There are roughly 23,000 calls alleging child abuse or neglect annually in Idaho. 70-80% of children in foster care are there due to neglect or other abuse. 27,000 children are in foster care each year. These statistics show a huge opportunity for LCSNW and other members of the community to step in and help. It was emphasized that difficulty finding childcare is a stronger predictor of maternal neglect than almost any

other factor, including mental health challenges, severity of drug use, history of abuse as a child, and use of public assistance.

Statistics regarding why preventing the need for foster care is so important were presented. 50% of individuals experiencing homelessness, 65% of sex trafficked victims, and 75% of inmates incarcerated have spent time in foster care. 50% of foster youth become homeless within 18 months after leaving care and by their 25th birthdays, 81% of males have been arrested and 35% have been incarcerated.

A member told the group that there are 1,200 children in foster care in Idaho as of June 2026.

A member asked if LCSNW's goal is to divert children from foster care. It was stated that it is important for children to have a safe place to go when crisis occurs, but early intervention could result in fewer foster care children. The group discussed how the program is aimed at preventing neglect and focusing on the upstream prevention this subcommittee has been talking about.

A young adult homelessness grant was discussed. An example of a young adult success story was provided to the group.

An overview of the Safe Families for Children program's circle of support was presented. The program aims to walk alongside parents to help them reach their goals, support families with goods and services, such as cribs, diapers, and meals, offer daily tasks, transportation, or be a friend, and care for children for a few hours, overnight, or up to 3+ months.

A member asked about the standards for hosting children. The committee discussed the difference between the Safe Families for Children program and foster care. LCSNW tends to get families that are trying to get childcare assistance through the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) or that need to pick up additional shifts and don't have anywhere to put their kids. Longer term hosting is not very common. It was emphasized that any volunteers that come into contact with children, especially those who host children, are required to undergo a background check.

A member asked what Safe Families for Children does for sexual violence prevention. The group discussed how stress and anxiety can lead to violence in homes, families, neighborhoods, and communities.

A member asked if there are education opportunities for youth to talk about sexual value and boundaries. The committee discussed how group homes can cause concern. Youth should know, if they are feeling at risk, what they can do and that they can say "no."

A member asked how this subcommittee can support Jessica's work. It was expressed that word of mouth, hospitals, schools, counselors, sexual or domestic violence centers,

volunteers, and churches all help to support LCSNW and their Safe Families for Children program.

A list of reasons Safe Families for Children is different than other options in the community was provided. LCSNW's focus is relationships. Parents maintain custody, have full contact with the children, are matched with a coach to set goals, support is free and voluntary, and relationships don't have to end when families exit from the program. It was emphasized that Safe Families for Children is not transactional.

The group discussed grants and other funding opportunities. It can be difficult to obtain long-term funding, so the Safe Families for Children program will continue to rely on grants.

A list of churches that work with LCSNW was provided. Members discussed that there are many other members of the community that help support the program. Some churches that are not listed provide employment opportunities or connections.

The community impact of the Safe Families for Children program was presented to the group. There have been 1,000+ nights of safe temporary care, 2,600+ childcare hours, 3,000+ parent coaching hours, 10 churches involved, 206 volunteers, and 200+ children not in foster care.

The return on investment for diverting children from foster care was discussed. For every \$1 invested in diverting children from foster care, taxpayers save \$11.67. This is a return on investment of 1000%. For 10 children, the long-term societal savings would be roughly \$3.89 million. The non-financial benefits are child wellbeing, stronger families, less trauma, and community health.

One of LCSNW's most popular events, Parent Café, was explained to the group. Parent Cafés offer parents support and connection through peer-led, community-based conversations to promote reflection and resilience. The event aims to leave parents feeling inspired, connected, and more capable. The event is so popular that they have a waitlist.

The impact of Parent Cafés was presented. The 13 parent café events had a total of 98 parents, 38 volunteers, 156 childcare hours, 300 meals, and 110 children. Due to the increasing popularity, they have had to limit the number of parents that can attend.

A member asked if the parents that attend are mostly from families LCSNW has supported. The group discussed that parents from all backgrounds attend the Parent Cafés, not just families they have served. Members discussed the importance of these events and the need to make them available for everyone.

A member asked about the sustainability of LCSNW's Safe Families for Children program. It was expressed that a lot of families come back to say they are in a better place and ask how they can help other families.

Another question was posed about how the Safe Families for Children program relates to sex crime prevention. The subcommittee talked about the importance of children having healthy connections within their community to help them talk about what they are experiencing before crisis occurs.

Members discussed how non-profits can talk about these topics with children. The committee talked about foster care and the very few resources available to remove sexually aggressive teens from environments with other children. Level 5 group homes that have a sex offender case manager were mentioned. It was noted that the statistics show that juvenile sex offenders do not always become adult sex offenders. Sometimes they act out in their peer group. The primary question should be "is it predatory and abusive or is it just wildly inappropriate and not accepted in the home?"

A committee member expressed that other countries have a robust curriculum regarding safe touch. This subcommittee doesn't have to reinvent the wheel. Countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway already include these critical topics in their education curricula. It was emphasized we just need resources and support to get it going here.

The committee discussed their goals as a group and what their role in prevention should look like moving forward.

A member asked if LCSNW runs into issues with volunteer fatigue. It was stated that they encourage staff and volunteers to take a break and remind them that it is okay to say no and prioritize their mental health. It was noted that some cases require a village to make it work. An example of a case that required several volunteers to take shifts transporting children to and from school was provided.

A member inquired what LCSNW would need to expand its programming to another region in Idaho. Jessica indicated there is quite a bit of infrastructure and risk management required to get up and running.

A member asked if anyone has studied what has changed for the families they have helped five years later. LCSNW would love to do that, and they have had families show a lot of gratitude for their work. The group expressed that it would be interesting to know what works best. A member shared their experience with foster care with the group.

A member inquired if LCSNW asks parents and families how they can improve their program. It was stated that they do ask and the ones that they have gotten back show strong protective factors.

5. Discussion of upcoming SCPS meetings

The subcommittee will meet next on August 6, 2026. The group will hear from a representative of Terry Reilly regarding sex offender treatment. The following meeting will be held on September 10, 2026. The group will hear from a representative of Camp Hope.