



POLK COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

United Way of Central Iowa

Virtual via Microsoft Teams

November 4, 2025

Voting Members Present: Alicia Chilton, Kevin Abler, Jake Al-Mazroa, Dave Arens, Gabrielle Brooks, Jessica Bruning, Suzanne Cohrs, Sam Early, Stephanie Giusto, Matthew Kelmme, Josh Laraby, Shay Scholtes, Megan Schultheis, Eric Tubbs; Tabitha Choquette joined at 11:47 a.m.

Voting Members Absent: Crhistian Ramirez, Stephen White

Ex-Officio Members Present: Aaron Johnson, Emily Westergaard

Ex-Officio Members Absent: Brook Rosenberg

Staff Present: Barb Bremner, Jody Kanne

Guests Present: None

Welcome

Board Chair Alicia Chilton welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 11:46 a.m. Quorum was met at this time.

Chilton called the special meeting after the Executive Committee met October 30, 2025. The purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the letter drafted by the Executive Committee and to discuss using this letter to communicate with the Early Childhood Iowa State Board to address board concerns regarding the Department of Health and Human Services continued push to regionalize ECI areas into districts aligned with the Behavioral Health Services map.

Tabitha Choquette joined at 11:47 a.m.

Letter to ECI State Board Members

Members received a draft of the letter on Monday prior to the distribution of the ECI State Board agenda today at 9:30 a.m. Bremner made suggest edits to the draft to respond to inclusion of an action item on the ECI State Board agenda to "allocate FY27 funding per the research informed HMA district geographies and corresponding counties." Bremner reviewed the suggested edits. Members then discussed the letter.

Discussion points made by members:

- Ask the state board to address concerns at an open meeting: what are the benefits of the new model, what problems specifically is it solving, implementation rollout (how are they going to make it work).
- Articulate what we want the letter to achieve: Why we think redistricting is a detriment and address the above questions.
- As the PCECI Board we should ask they table and/or vote no.

- Letter needs a stronger emphasis on how the current structure is working well for kids in Polk County. There is a risk for our programs/constituents in not having as many board members involved. Stress the current structure is able to serve our children, and we would not be able to serve them as well with the changes. We are committed partners and have not had the opportunity to be engaged in the proposed changes.
- Some ECI areas are ready for the changes/redistricting, and this is a solution for them but not all areas.
- District 6 and 3 have submitted applications for merging, each have ECI areas in their district who have indicated they are unable to bring in other areas until the state makes their decision on redistricting. This will provide pressure on state board members.
- Do we need to address the fact this is a mandate and not an option?
- ECI has already gone through a consolidation. Challenge the state board will have is to create something that works universally. The early childhood system isn't as smooth as it should be statewide.
- Boards haven't been given the option to give input or discuss collaborating, having local say over what is happening is concerning.
- The early childhood space was created around the idea that local areas knew the needs in their communities. Local areas have the option to work with other areas if they see that as a better fit by the processes already in place.
- Action items to include in the letter to the state board:
 - Emphasizing the current structure is working for the children in Polk County
 - There are opportunities for improvement, Polk County board is concerned about the proposed changes with no local input.
 - There are currently policies in place for areas that prefer to merge.

Suzanne Cohrs made the motion to approve editing the draft to reflect today's member discussion followed by review and approval by members of the Executive Committee prior to board chair Chilton emailing the letter to the ECI State Board. The motion was seconded by Josh Laraby.

A roll call vote was taken. Each member voted in favor of the motion. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Old Business

None.

New Business

None.

Adjournment

Dave Arens made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Suzanne Cohrs seconded. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chilton adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.