



**POLK COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA BOARD MEETING**  
**United Way of Central Iowa**  
**Leadership Room**  
**January 28, 2026**

**Voting Members Present:** Alicia Chilton, Kevin Abler, Sam Early, Matthew Klemme, Megan Schultheis; Participating via Teams Jake Al-Mazroa, Dave Arens, Jessica Bruning, Tabitha Choquette, Josh Laraby, Shay Scholtes

**Voting Members Absent:** Gabrielle Brooks, Suzanne Cohrs, Christian Ramirez, Eric Tubbs, Stephen White

**Ex-Officio Members Present:** Brook Rosenberg, Emily Westergaard

**Ex-Officio Members Absent:** Aaron Johnson

**Staff Present:** Barb Bremner, Jody Kanne

**Guests Present:** Tammy Engebretson, Director of Quality Initiatives, Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children; Adriana Flores, Program Manager, and Molly Gosselink, Vice President Community Health Services, both EveryStep

**Welcome**

Board Chair Alicia Chilton welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. Quorum was met at this time. Guest introductions were made.

**Approval December Minutes**

Minutes of board meeting December 17, 2025, were presented. There were no comments or corrections.

*A motion to approve the December 2025 minutes was made by Sam Early and seconded by Kevin Abler. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.*

**December FY26 Financial Report**

Matthew Klemme presented the November FY26 financial report. Expenditures are tracking as expected with no concerns. EveryStep has expended 29% of the home visitation contract and 26% of the coordinated intake contract, Bremner has been in contact with EveryStep and expects the organization to be back on track by February processing.

The LSI Child Development Home Quality Improvement contract has been added to the expenditure utilizing the non-contracted funds. Remaining non-contracted funds total \$352,947.61. These funds will be utilized for the funding requests being reviewed today.

*A motion to approve the December FY26 financials was made by Kevin Abler and seconded by Josh Laraby. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.*

### **Additional funding requests for FY26**

Applications for additional funding were available for all current contractors on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. The deadline for submitting applications was January 5<sup>th</sup>. Bremner reviewed the 14 funding requests received.

Member discussions:

- Jai Olive – Funding would fill the gap for doulas who have completed training but need to work with clients in order to complete their certification. Bremner met with EveryStep who will collaborate with Jai Olive; they are confident they will have 32 expectant moms necessary for the doulas to meet their certification requirements.
- Raising Readers – Members had concerns on funds being used for fundraising. Requested contract be issued in support of books to children, not overhead costs.
- ICOACH/Shalom – Transportation – New contract for both agencies this year, contracts issued lower due to no baseline data. Both contracts close to being fully expended by December. Recommend additional \$16,000 per organization.
- ICOACH/Shalom – Classroom Wage Enhancement – Contract covers staffing and administrative costs. Shalom's high request included adding an additional day of preschool. Recommend increasing funding for both programs \$15,000.
- Dental Connections – Funds would be utilized for administrative costs. Current contract covers onsite visits for dental screening and fluoride varnish for children at coalition centers.

*A motion to approve the FY26 additional funding recommendations as presented, with the Raising Readers contract being issued for program materials only, was made by Sam Early and seconded by Megan Schultheis. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.*

### **HHS Legislation affecting ECI-Advocacy**

Health and Human Services introduced HSB 623 January 27, 2026. This bill would eliminate Early Childhood Iowa and other early childhood services and replace it with a new HHS Early Childhood and Family Services System. The system would include families with children to age 19, with no specific focus on early childhood or prenatal care. The system would go into effect July 1, 2027 with FY27 being a transitional period. The bill would also move all home visitation contracts to HHS, effectively removing 40% from the Polk County ECI budget

Discussions:

- Edie Walton has registered against the bill for the Association.
- Emily Westergaard reported ECI districts issue a total of 524 contract statewide with only 76 being referred to as "duplicates" by HHS. Those identified as duplicates are organizations which hold more than one contract with more than one ECI area.
- Messaging to legislators needs to address the need for local control of funding to address local needs.
- HHS framing system as creating efficiencies, streamlining services, reducing administration. HHS proposes statewide services moved to HHS.
- Concerns on the bills lack of support for childcare providers and workforce.

- At the December State ECI Board meeting, members discussed a plan to address a designation process, governance and oversight, and allowing for merging of areas where there is local interest in doing so.
- Messaging will be important to share area success stories, highlight local impact.

*Dave Arens departed meeting at 9:20 a.m.*

- Members were encouraged to reach out to the legislators on the House HHS committee, in Polk County, and any legislators they have relationships with via email by Friday.
- Bremner is available to attend meetings if members wish to schedule times with their legislator.
- Bremner will email language to use when emailing legislators.

### **Program review and FY27 budgeting**

Bremner shared programs will be asked to submit budget information for FY27 funding. They have already submitted program outcomes for the first half of the fiscal year and this information will be a part of program review. Virtual meetings will be scheduled with programs depending on the outcomes of the HHS bill.

### **Administrative Report**

- Stephanie Giusto resigned from the board at the end of November. She accepted a position with EveryStep as an administrator for the Healthy Family America program.

### **Old Business**

- Early thanked Bremner for efficiently opening the FY26 mid-cycle funding application and creating an effective and strategic way to distribute funds to programs.

### **New Business**

None.

### **Public Comment**

- Tammy Engebretson thanked the board for their continued support.

### **Adjournment**

*Sam Early made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Matthew Klemme seconded. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.*

Chilton adjourned the meeting at 9:29 a.m.