

ICWA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Date: October 1, 2025

Time: 2:00 PM

Location: State Office Building, Sioux Falls, SD

1. Call to Order & Welcome

Chair: Matt Althoff, Cabinet Secretary, Department of Social Services

Secretary Althoff called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM and welcomed Council members and guests. He emphasized the importance of continued collaboration between state and tribal partners and encouraged participation in the upcoming Community Response to Child Abuse Conference on Oct 2-3, 2025.

2. Attendees

Appointed Council Members

- Senator Tamara Grove, District 26
- Donita Loudner, CCST ICWA
- Deborah Divine, SWO CPS/ICWA
- Jessica Morson, FSST CPS/ICWA
- Alicia Mousseau, OST Vice President
- Representative Peri Pourier, District 27 (virtual)

Other Attendees

- Algin Young, Cabinet Secretary, Department of Tribal Relations
- Kathy Black Bear, Sicangu Child and Family Services
- Shirley Bad Wound, RST ICWA
- Sara Kelly, Court Improvement Coordinator, UJS
- Brenda Tidball-Zeltinger, DSS Deputy Cabinet Secretary
- Tiffany Wolfgang, DSS Chief of Children and Families
- Jeremy Lippert, DSS Director of Legal Services
- Becky Nelson, Administrator, DSS Office of Licensing and Accreditation
- Chrissy Young, Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment (USD)
- Pamela Bennett, DSS/CPS Division Director
- Joseph Ashley, DSS/CPS ICWA Program Specialist

- Sara Sheppick, DSS/CPS Deputy Director
- Vicki Burger, DSS/CPS Regional Manager
- Jenn and Pete Eckhoff, Foster Parents and Foster605 Directors (virtual)
- Misty Brammer, Casey Family Programs (virtual)
- Sheldon Spotted Elk, Casey Family Programs (virtual)
- Anita Leslie, Foster Parent

3. Presentation: ICWA Courts and Tribal Collaboration

Presenter: Sheldon Spotted Elk, Casey Family Programs

Sheldon provided an overview of the ICWA Court model, emphasizing judicial leadership, data-driven decision-making, training, and collaboration with tribal nations. The presentation focused on how ICWA Courts can strengthen culturally responsive practices and improve outcomes for Native children and families.

- **Judicial Leadership:** Sheldon highlighted that committed, culturally humble judges are essential for successful ICWA Courts. Judicial leaders must engage directly with families and communities.
- **Data Collection:** Effective data systems are vital to measure outcomes, identify gaps, and capture both quantitative data and qualitative insights from lived experience.
- **Training:** Training should ensure all participants including judges, attorneys, and social workers understand both the letter and the spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- **Tribal Nation Collaboration:** Building trust and co-designing solutions with tribes is foundational. Partnerships enable culturally appropriate practices and improve family outcomes.

Sheldon facilitated a short survey to assess participants' understanding of ICWA Courts and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Results showed varying levels of familiarity. The compiled findings will be shared with members to guide future discussion.

4. South Dakota Safety Model and Poverty vs. Neglect

Presenters: Pamela Bennett and Chrissy Young

Pamela and Chrissy reviewed South Dakota's Safety Model and discussed the distinction between poverty and neglect. They emphasized accurate assessments, targeted supports, and continued training to maintain consistency in practice.

- **Poverty vs. Neglect:** Poverty alone is not neglect. Evidence shows, however, that limited financial resources elevate risks of neglects to a child's safety when these conditions are combined with factors such as substance use, trauma-informed behaviors, or mental health challenges.
- **Assessment and Intervention:** Accurate safety assessments are critical to identifying real danger threats and ensuring the least intrusive and most supportive interventions. DSS agreed to provide committee members a copy of the safety model protocols used by specialists when completing assessments.
- **Data on Neglect:** Pamela shared statewide data showing neglect remains the most frequent type of maltreatment, with common contributing factors including caregiver substance abuse and lack of parenting knowledge.

5. Data on Children in Care

Presenter: Pamela Bennett

Pamela provided a handout with updated data from South Dakota's annual one-time count taken on June 30, 2025:

- 1,694 children in state custody
- 1,181 identified as Native American, although not all enrolled or eligible for enrollment.

The group discussed continued collaboration with State and tribes to ensure accurate identification and documentation of tribal affiliation.

6. Next Steps and Discussion

The Council agreed to explore the feasibility of an ICWA Court pilot, beginning with further analysis and discussion with judicial leadership. The next meeting will be scheduled before Christmas, tentatively in early December to align with the ICWA Coalition meeting in Pierre.

8. Adjournment

Secretary Althoff thanked members for their participation and reaffirmed the Council's shared commitment to improving outcomes for Native American children and families.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45 PM CT.