



Montana Early Childhood Account Board Meeting

January 7, 2026

9:00AM-10:30AM Via Zoom

Board Members in Attendance: Tracy Moseman, Kathy Deserly, Crystal Armstrong, Mackenzie Espeland, Caitlin Jensen, Louisa Libertelli-Dunn, Tory Scribner, Angie Porch, Jackie Ronning, Beth Branam

The meeting is called to order by Michelle Cusey (Montana Early Childhood Account Manager) at 9:00AM.

Introduction and Welcome

Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras discussed the purpose of the board and the core principles that it shall follow:

- Focus on children and families
- Strengthen the childcare workforce
- Support provider stability
- Prioritize equity and access
- Emphasize accountability and results with clear goals that have measurable outcomes

Board Member Introductions

- Michelle Cusey
 - MECA Account Manager with DPHHS ECFSD
 - Mother of three young girls
 - Excited to help shape Montana's early childhood system
- Tracy Moseman
 - Administrator of DPHHS ECFSD
 - Ready to bring together cross sectors for supporting early care and education of Montana's children
- Kathy Deserly
 - American Indian Child and Family Program Manager at the Office of American Indian Health
 - Focusing on child welfare and families in crisis
- Crystal Armstrong
 - Administrator of the Workforce Services Division at the Department of Labor and Industry
 - Ready to contribute her knowledge to help strengthen Montana's childcare workforce
- Mackenzie Espeland
 - Business MT Administrator with the Department of Commerce
 - Excited to help Montana's childcare providers expand their businesses
- Caitlin Jensen
 - Executive Director at Zero to Five
 - Mother of three small children



- Ready to share her perspective on broadening the early childhood system and landscape in Montana.
- Louisa Libertelli-Dunn
 - Executive Director at Pete's Place
 - Representing parents and providers on this board
 - Wants to help forge a new frontier for all of Montana's children
- Tori Scribner
 - Works as in congress as a case manager
 - Mother of a small child
 - Eager to bring her experience as a parent to help navigate safe and healthy environments for children in Montana
- Angie Porch
 - Childcare provider in the state of Montana
 - Ready to bring her expertise to help solve problems with retention and recruitment in Montana's early childhood workforce.
- Jackie Ronning
 - Early Literacy Coordinator with the Office of Public Instruction
 - Excited to help her community with her knowledge of the early childhood ecosystem.

Legislative Foundation

Michelle Cusey reviews the MECA overview recounting the purpose of the account as well as the board.

The account was created to strengthen the early childcare system it is not meant to replace or supplement the system already in place.

Legislature created the board to provide governance and oversight. Ideally this will provide a balance between state coordination and lived experiences of community stakeholders. All decisions should be informed from the state level as well as on the ground experience.

The board is made up of ten people appointed by the governor. Each board member will typically serve a term of three years.

Required duties of the board

- Establishing funding priorities informed by fiscal analysis
- Approving and monitoring funding
- Evaluating the effectiveness of funded activities and programs
- Annual reporting obligation to the Education internal committee and the Family Health Services internal committee



The bill is very intentional on what funds may be used for. The statute authorizes the board to approve funds for services and activities that strengthen Montana's early care and education system with an emphasis on system level impacts.

There are a handful of categories for allowable uses of funds this includes

- Workforce development
- Quality improvement
- Affordability initiatives
- State childcare subsidy system

Funding/Budget

Shannon Mackey (Fiscal Bureau Chief- ECFSD) discusses the fiscal basics in relation to the bill. This information is in relation to appropriations versus cash. She discusses how appropriation can limit the amount of cash that is expendable. For example, the total cash revenue for this bill is 10 million dollars, however the appropriation limits the cash spending to 7.5 million dollars. The budget cycle will match the state fiscal year.

Nicole Quirino (Budget Analyst- ECFSD) reviews the expenses that have already been utilized. At the time these include personal services and operating expenses. Nicole has also included a twelve-month projection for these expenses in the presentation. Non budgeted expenses will not be deducted from the annual appropriation. These are also known as indirect costs. ECFSD Fiscal will be helping to provide updated projections throughout the use of the trust. Fiscal will be documenting revenue monthly. Interest is anticipated to be deposited into the trust annually in the month of August

The governor's staff has recommended spending 3.5 million in the first fiscal year to allow a portion of the current revenue balance to be carried over into fiscal year 2027, as well as allowing for the interest of the trust to grow.

There is a question about the projection of the interest that would be earned by only spending 3.5 million of the trust. Fiscal will be looking into this further as they do not have a solid projection at this time.

There is a question about what rent is within operating expenses. This is for office space for the Early Childhood Account Manager.

Bylaws

Michelle Cusey presents the Bylaws which details:

- How the board will function
- How meetings are ran



- How decisions are made
- How authority is exercised.

The bylaws are in draft form and will not be adopted until the next board meeting in February. Board members will need to review all articles of the bylaws in depth before the next meeting.

Michelle facilitates a reading of the bylaws by the board so that they may ask any questions or make suggestions.

There is a question from Crystal Armstrong about Section 3 Article 2 of the bylaws in regards to proxy voting. She is wondering if remote voting will be available in the event that a board member is not able to attend an in-person meeting.

Michelle's understanding is that this will be up to the board. If they vote to allow virtual attendance this should not be an issue. Tracy Moseman (ECFSD Administrator) comments that there may be a statute that prevents board members from utilizing proxy votes. There will be follow-up and clarification on this.

Next Meeting

The next in-person meeting for the board will be February 3rd in the second half of the day (1:00 PM- 5:00 PM) and February 4th for the full day (8:30AM- 3:00PM) tentatively in Helena, MT.

It is noted that unless the board needs a virtual meeting. All board meetings will be in person these will still be open to the public but there will not be an option to view remotely.

Next steps and materials to be sent out by Michelle Cusey.

Public Comment

- *"My name is Grace Decker, and I am the director of Montana Advocates for Children which is a coalition of statewide organizations who are concerned with childcare and making sure that families can access affordable and high-quality childcare when they need it. There are currently 15 statewide organizations that are apart of the MEC coalition, and our priorities really align so well with the priorities that you've outlined in this meeting am so grateful to all of the folks who are volunteering their time (a significant amount of time) to be a part of this board and to make really important decisions that are going to impact families. We are excited to see that childcare is a top concern for this board. Although of course we know that the needs of the early childhood system are broader than childcare. As you begin your work and go about your deliberations, we would really encourage you to put first things first and think about the foundational roles of this system and then build from there. So, I look forward to following the work of the board closely and I also am ready to be a resource to you in any way that I can. I am regularly in touch with many childcare providers in programs of all sizes all over the state. So, I do have a pretty good*



ear to the ground. Thank you again for your work and thanks for a really informative first meeting.

- *“Hey, my name is Megkian Doyle and I am the Executive Director for a Native American non-profit called Not Shadow Association. We have an early childhood center (just a small one right now) but our primary target population is kids in kinship care. Their parents are struggling with addiction. I love the work that you guys are doing and the discussions that you’re having. We’re working really hard to navigate the places where the current system doesn’t fit. The population that we are trying to serve, particularly, as far as it goes with best beginnings scholarships and things like that where parents need to be filling out the paperwork and we do not have parents available. I am just really interested in learning and listening and I am really thankful that these meetings are public so that I can learn and listen and appreciate the work that you guys are all doing.”*

The meeting is adjourned by Michelle Cusey at 10:25 AM