

## Oversight Overview: Interim Oversight Committees (Transcript)

Welcome to Oversight Overview, a video series by the Levin Center's State Oversight Academy at Wayne State University Law School. We will take a look at how states across the country are performing oversight of a particular issue, or in a particular way. Today, we will be examining oversight conducted in the interim session.

An interim committee is "a committee established to study or investigate certain matters between annual or biennial legislative sessions and to report to the next regular session." An interim session is that time between the regular legislative sessions.

In this video, we will focus on three states – Alabama, Colorado, and Utah. All three perform most of their oversight functions in the interim session. After an overview of the interim oversight committees, we'll take a closer look at each state's child welfare interim committees and see how they compare. We'll start by heading down south to Alabama.

Alabama's joint interim committees address many oversight topics, including rural broadband oversight, the Child First Trust Fund grant, the Housing Finance Authority, homeland security, the Workforce Development Division, children in state care, license plates, nuclear energy activities and hazardous chemical toxic waste, and information technology. Full jurisdictional information for these committees can be found on SOA's State Legislative Oversight Wiki, and you can find a link in this video's accompanying document.

Alabama's Interim Legislative Oversight Committee on Children in State Care is a permanent committee responsible for studying and reviewing the criteria for placing and keeping children in state care; reviewing selection criteria of childcare providers; reviewing the availability of special services for children; gathering input from providers, state agencies, and children; and more. The committee reports findings and recommendations to the Legislature when the regular session starts. Alabama's committees do not have individual websites, so meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, and other information is not readily available. The committee is comprised of three Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House and three Senators appointed by the Lieutenant Governor.

Let's go west to Colorado, where they're also having a busy interim session. A legislative oversight committee as well as a commission look into jail standards. You can read more about their work on the SOA blog, *State Oversight Matters*, and you'll find a link to the post in the accompanying document. Another oversight committee considers tax policy. You can find jurisdictional information for these committees on the Wiki. Other study and review committees meeting during the interim consider matters such as the child welfare system, ozone air quality, opioid and substance use disorders, pensions, recidivism rates, statewide health care, facial recognition services, transportation legislation, treatment of persons with behavioral health disorders in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, water resources and agriculture, and wildlife matters.

The goal of Colorado's Child Welfare System Interim Study Committee is to look at the child welfare system as a whole, rather than focusing on each policy issue as a separate piece of the puzzle. The committee proposed taking a holistic look at the "system to address the major factors facing the system in order to serve our state's children and families in the best possible way." It receives presentations from "existing task forces, commissions, and boards related to child welfare" and hears "input from parents, children, relatives, and foster parents."

The committee studies a variety of issues, including federal and state laws that govern child welfare; child abuse and neglect reporting; the investigation and assessment process; the removal process; child abuse and neglect rates; judicial processes; prevention services; intervention services; and many more.

The committee is comprised of 11 members, 4 senators, and 7 representatives. They intend to hold 5 meetings during this interim session, and are allowed to introduce 5 bills to address the issues it studies. At its first two meetings, it has heard testimony from the Colorado Department of Human Services, County Departments of Human Services, Office of the Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman, Office of the Child's Representative, foster organizations, Children's Hospital Colorado, and others. Materials are available on the committee's website. Issues of particular interest to the committee in this interim session include:

- Racial inequities in the child welfare system
- Inequities faced by parents with disabilities
- The shortage of caseworkers
- Issues with the statewide information system used by caseworkers
- Deficient process for reprimanding bad caseworkers
- Failures to remove children from dangerous homes

Across the border in Utah, three oversight committees meet in the interim: the Administrative Rules Review and General Oversight Committee, the Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel, and the Senate Legislative Expense Oversight Committee. A number of coordinating and review committees also convene to discuss issues including education and mental health, judicial rules review, legislative management, and legislative process. Many of the standing committees also meet occasionally during the interim session.

Utah's Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel is tasked with "examin[ing] and observ[ing] the process and execution of laws governing the child welfare system by the executive branch and the judicial branch." It receives "testimony from the public, the juvenile court," and state agencies "involved with the child welfare system." It receives annual reports from the Administrative Office of the Courts identifying cases of noncompliance regarding shelter hearings, pretrial and adjudication hearings, dispositional hearings, reunification services, and permanency hearings and petitions for termination. The panel makes recommendations to the governor, the Legislature, the attorney general, the juvenile courts, the Department of Health and Human Services; Division of Child and Family Services; and others; studies and recommends

changes to the laws governing the child welfare systems; and provides an annual report to the leadership of the Legislature. It can also review individual child welfare cases but cannot make recommendations regarding the disposition of individual cases.

To perform its oversight duties, the Panel has access to all the Division of Child and Family Services records, including records of individual child welfare cases. It can hold public hearings and has legislative subpoena powers, as well as all powers granted to legislative interim committees.

The Panel is composed of two members of the Senate, one from the majority party and one from the minority party; and three members of the House, two from the majority and one from the minority. Members serve two-year terms. Meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, audio/video, materials, studies and recommendations, and legislation are available on the panel's website.

There are many other states performing oversight during their interim sessions, including West Virginia, Indiana, Wisconsin, and more. You can read about some of those efforts on the *State Oversight Matters* blog.

We'll be back soon for another Oversight Overview, but until then, we're heading back to the Levin Center in Detroit. If there is a topic you'd like to see us cover or if you have any question about oversight in your state, we'd love to hear from you. Please check out the State Oversight Academy website at [stateoversight.org](https://stateoversight.org). Our contact information and links to the offices you've seen in this video are available in the accompany document. Thanks for joining us!