Early Learning Coalition of Florida's Heartland, Inc.

www.elcfh.org

ELCFH Administrative Committee Meeting
Thursday, November 5, 2026 at 9:00 AM via ZOOM

Zoom meeting link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88313643753?pwd=5HCWOtaCHoWF18QRclVcUTnJ3TQZFb.1
Meeting ID: 883 1364 3753 **Password:** 229949 **Phone:** +1 305 224 1968

Committee Chair- Aaron Stitt

Agenda Item	Content
1. Opening and Introductions	
2. FY 26-27 Board Membership p. 2-4	a. **Board Membership Application review:** Darlene Eckert, Private Sector Business, Charlotte County b. **Gubernatorial Appointments:** per DEL, these are on hold. ELCFH has two applications on file with three open positions. c. **Board Member Training/ Orientation:** ELC Non-profit Presentation from Board Meeting- any feedback for discussion?
3. ELCFH Employee Handbook Policy p. 5-6 p. 7-13	**Krizner HR Audit** was held on August 18, 2026 and included management level training. • Audit overview • Policy recommendations
4. ELCFH Bylaws (DEL updates) p. 14	**a. Section 5.2.1- Meeting notices:** update number of calendar days for meeting notice from 5 to 7. **b. Section 6.2.4- Standing Committees (Quality Committee):** wording update from environmental assessment to program assessment. **c. Section 8.1- Records Retention:** add required statement referencing clarification of time period for retention.
d. Open Forum and Adjourn	

Item 2: Board Membership Application

BOARD
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Early Learning Coalition of Florida's Heartland, Inc.

For questions please contact:

Anne Brewer, Executive Director
Early Learning Coaltion of Florida's Heartland,
Port Charlotte FL, 33948
Cell: (863) 558-1661 **Email:** abrewer@elcfh.org

Personal Information

Full Name: Darlene Marie Eckert

Home Address: 2150 Oyster Creek Drive

City: Englewood State: Florida Zipcode: 34224

Personal Phone Number: (941) 321-8187 Personal Email: darlenemeckert@gmail.com

Employer Details

Employer Name: Pinnacle Financial dba Synovus Bank Job Title: Senior Vice President

Employer Address: 1255 N Tamiami Trail

City: Port Charlotte State: Florida Zipcode: 33953

Business Phone: (941) 235-4275 Business Email: darleneeckert@synovus.com

My Employer is: (choose one) A private for-profit business

My Employer Operates in (list all applicable counties/states): Florida & Georgia & Tennessee & Alabama & South Carolina

What is your Preferred contact preference? (choose one): My business/employer contact information

Membership-Board Seat Type

Early Learning Coalition Board seats are established in 1002.83 F.S. Please indicate the applicable Board seat below.

Seat Type (choose one): Private Sector Business (PSB)

Do you currently have policy making or hiring authority in the above name business (or retired from said business)? Yes

Do you or your families member receive income from childcare/ early learning programs? No

Please indicate which type of program you currently work in:

Statement of Interest

Please tell us about your interest in becoming an ELCFH Board Member.

I have volunteered in the past for ELC of Sarasota County, and saw firsthand what a positive impact it had made on the families and children especially! I also saw when my daughter utilized the ELC of Manatee County in past to help her with childcare costs while she was a single mother working and earning a limited income-without ELC she would not have been able to do this. Now that I live and work in Charlotte County I am focused to help in this area and felt it was wise to offer my help with your affiliate. I am very excited to partner with such an amazing non-profit who I believe makes a positive impact on our community and look forward to the opportunity to do so.

Community/Civic Involvement

Please list up to five community, civic, professional, business and/or other organizations with which you are or have been affiliated as a member and/or an officer.

Organization	Dates of Membership	Offices/Positions Held
Habitat for Humanity of South ...	Jan 2016-current	President of Board-Committe ...
Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota ...	2022-2025	Volunteer and Literacy Buddy ...
Big Brothers Big Sisters of SWFL	2024-to current	Volunteer/Big Sister/Financial ...
Junior Achievement	2025-current	Volunteer/ambassador

Applicant Characteristics (Optional)

The ELCFH works to reflect the community we serve. To help us in that effort, please respond to the questions below.

Race: White, Non Hispanic Gender: Female Age: 51 or older

Veteran: No Parent: Yes Children's Ages: 41 & 38 & 32

Do you require any special accommodation in order to participate fully in the ELCFH business meetings? If Yes, specify.

No

Commitment and Operational Statements

Time Commitment: Serving as an ELC Board Member will require a commitment of time, including attendance at regular Board meeting and committee involvement, and may include visiting early learning program sites, ELC events, and becoming educated about many aspects of early childhood development and school readiness. Board meetings are generally held 4-5 times annually.

Conflict of Interest: A conflict of interest may occur when an item is presented for a vote that will directly affect you, your employer, your immediate family, or another organization with which you are affiliated. Conflict of interest issues generally requires you to disclose the conflict and abstain from discussion/vote on the matter.

Membership Requirements: Legislation specific to Early Learning Coalition Board composition requirements can be found in 1002.83 F.S. Locally developed policy for ELCFH governance can be found at www.elcfh.org- Board Member Resources tab. All new Board members are required to attend a new Board Member orientation.

Sunshine Law: The ELCFH is a legislatively mandated group and operates under the general Florida guidelines of the Sunshine Law (Section 286.011, F.S.) and Public Records Law (Chapter 119, F.S.)

Can you commit to regular attendance at Board and Committee meetings held generally held 5 times a year? Yes

Resume

Please attach a copy of your resume with your membership application.

Submitted electronically
Signature:

09-22-2026
Date:

Item 3: FY 26-27 Krizner Group HR Audit: The scope of this audit consisted of the below listed components, applicable samples to demonstate current ELCFH processes, and management team level training on the protected factors within employment law. Proposed updates/ new policies/ forms for the ELCFH follow. **The following topics were reviewed:**

A. Pre-Employment Screening Reviews: Candidate Education Verification; Driving records

B. New Leader Formation: onboarding and training

C. FLSA - review of all ELCFH employees who are listed as exempt; and review of common mistakes with non-exempt staff- lunch breaks, compensatory time, deductions below minimum wage

D. Employee medical issues: ADA; Additional leave time, return to work, undue hardship on the agency regarding a requested accommodation.

E. Issues involving social media use by employees: included grid on posting of statements/ images and whether they could result in disciplinary action.

F. Internal investigations: review of best practices when investigating internal complaints.

G. Pregnancy considerations: accommodations, leave time, lactation; appropriately worded policies.

H. Medical Marijuana: included a grid by state verifying the legality (or not) of marijuana.

I. Professionalism in the workplace and executive leadership succession planning

J. Responding to employment references: authorized party (who may respond per ELCFH policy); information provided (what is allowable per ELCFH policy).

K. Weapons at work update: new sign posted at ELCFH offices (no weapons permitted except for our partners in law enforcement).

L. Corrective Action review: operational standards and impact; defined and measurable expectations; evaluation period and follow-up.

M. Involuntary Separation and Layoffs: separation compensation considerations; termination witnesses; involuntary separation memorandum.

N. Responding to legal requests associated with employment: documentation requests; subpoenas for depositions; wage garnishment

O. Board of Directors training- Board orientation

P. Employee Handbook- the auditor suggested adding the following policies to the Employee Handbook:

a. Employee communication limitations
b. Employment reference and verification policy
c. Disability accommodations
d. Required medical documentation for absences
e. Pregnancy, childbirth & lactation accommodations
f. Medical Marijuana
g. Social media policy
h. Use of generative artificial intelligence
i. AI wearable devices

Item 3: FY 26-27 Krizner Group HR Audit- Policy Recommendations

1. **Employee Employment References/Release of Information (3.11) -** no changes- the current policy aligns with the policy provided by Krizner Group.

2. **Social Media (4.1)-** no changes needed- policy aligns with the one presented by Krizner Group.

3. **Accommodations (2.2)-** new language is underlined

It is the objective of the ELCFH to ensure adherence to all relevant and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ELCFH will not discriminate against any qualified individual with respect to any terms, privileges, or conditions of employment because of a person's mental or physical disability.

Reasonable accommodations will be made wherever necessary for all employees or applicants with disabilities, provided that the individual is otherwise qualified to safely perform the duties and assignments connected with the job and provided that any accommodations made do not require significant difficulty or expenses. If the employee cannot perform the essential functions of their position with the requested accommodation, the employee may be separated from the ELCFH. Those needing special accommodations should contact the ELCFH Executive Director so consideration can be given to reasonable accommodations.

Examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- changes to the work environment and may include making existing facilities readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities;
- job restructuring;
- offering part-time or modified work schedules;
- time off from work;
- working remotely;
- reassignment to an alternative position;
- acquiring or modifying equipment or devices.

In most cases, medical documentation will be requested in support of the need for the accommodation following the request for accommodation

If a pregnant employee is in need of any type of reasonable accommodation, including light duty, modified work assignment, or other similar assistance, the employee should immediately contact their direct supervisor/ Executive Director. All such requests for reasonable accommodation that do not result in an undue hardship will be provided.

Any applicant or employee who believes that he or she has been discriminated against may file a complaint with the Executive Director, the Florida Commission on Human Relations, or the Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Complaints will be treated in accordance with the procedures set forth by law.An approved accommodation that results in an employee working from home will require a completed and signed telecommute agreement on the approved *ELCFH Employee Work from Home Agreement* form.

Requests for an accommodation of indefinite or undetermined amount of leave likely constitutes an undue hardship and will not be approved.

- An "undue hardship" is defined as a significant difficulty or expense that would be incurred if the accommodation were implemented. In determining whether an accommodation would impose an undue hardship, the following factors are considered:
- The nature and cost of the accommodation when compared to the departmental or ELCFH finances.
- The effect of the accommodation on the operation of the department, facility, and overall ELCFH.
- The number of employees with similar skills or assigned similar responsibilities

4. Absenteeism (6.4):

The employee must notify the supervisor directly by phone/cell phone that they will be late or absent from work prior to start time of each work day affected. If the immediate supervisor is on PLT, or not available, another supervisor or Director must be contacted. Excessive absences, tardiness, or absences without approved leave, may be cause for disciplinary action.

~~If an employee is absent more than 3 consecutive days the employee may be required to bring a doctor's note verifying they are allowed to resume work. If an employee is convalescing at home under doctor's care and indicates a desire to work from home, a doctor's note will be required describing the extent of work activity the employee may engage in from home (including computer work/e-mails). If an employee is absent for three consecutive workdays without authorization or appropriate notification, the employee may be considered to have abandoned his or her position and may be terminated.~~

A medical certification that supports that the absence was the result of a medical issue may be required for unscheduled absences extending beyond three (3) consecutive days. A medical clearance may be required prior to returning to work in the case of frequent absences, prolonged absences, following an absence related to a work-related injury, or if there are concerns regarding the safety of the employee or others.

When an accommodation for a disability is requested, medical certification showing the need for the accommodation will be required prior to consideration of the requested accommodation.
If an employee is otherwise eligible for a medical leave of absence, a medical certification will be required prior to approving the leave. All medical documentation is treated as confidential and sensitive and is maintained separately from the employee's personnel file within the Human Resources Department.

5. Equal Employment Opportunity (2.1)

The ELCFH is committed to the principle and practice of equal opportunity and affirmative action. The ELCFH intends to comply with the letter and spirit of federal, state and local laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination in all terms and conditions of employment practices including recruiting, selection, hiring, person, promotion, transfer, compensation, and benefits for all qualified applicants and employees without regard to race, color, religion, veteran status, national origin, sex, disability, age, genetic information, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender, marital status or any other protected status in accordance with the requirements of all federal, state, and local laws.

Replace with full Pregnancy, Childbirth, & Lactation Accommodations (policy listed below)

~~The ELCFH fully abides by the requirements stated in the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) which expressly prohibits employment discrimination based on pregnancy and pregnancy-related conditions. The ELCFH does not discriminate against employees or applicants with respect to pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions including pre- and post- pregnancy conditions. The ELCFH will not deny an employment opportunity or take adverse action against an employee because of the employee's pregnancy, pregnancy-related condition, or request for reasonable accommodation. Likewise, the ELCFH will not refuse to hire a pregnant applicant or an applicant with a pregnancy-related condition because of the pregnancy or pregnancy-related condition, as long as doing so would not create an undue hardship for the ELCFH.~~

~~The ELCFH will make reasonable accommodations to the known limitations related to the pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions of a qualified employee, unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the ability of the ELCFH to properly fulfill its mission. Upon notification of an employee's pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical condition, the ELCFH will engage in an interactive process to determine appropriate accommodations. Accommodations may include, but are not limited to, more frequent or longer breaks, time off to recover from childbirth, acquisition or modification of equipment, appropriate seating, temporary transfer to a less strenuous or less hazardous position, job restructuring, light duty, modified work schedule, and private space that is not a bathroom for expressing breast milk. Requests for reasonable accommodations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the employee's job responsibilities, medical needs, and the ELCFH operational requirements. Accommodation will be provided unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship.~~

~~**Excerpt from 2.12- Nursing/ Expressing Accommodations:**~~

~~ELCFH will provide a lactation area that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public. The ELCFH will also provide reasonable break times for an employee to express breast milk.~~

Krizner Group Recommendation- Replacement Policy: Pregnancy, Childbirth, & Lactation Accommodations (Policy #5- continued):

The ELCFH is committed to supporting the health, safety, and success of pregnant employees, employees experiencing pregnancy-related conditions, and employees who are expressing breast milk after childbirth. The ELCFH recognizes that pregnancy and the post-partum period can create workplace needs that require flexible, individualized solutions. In compliance with the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA), the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) federal lactation requirements, and all other applicable laws, the ELCFH provides reasonable accommodations that allow employees to continue performing the essential functions of their positions without discrimination, retaliation, or undue hardship.

Our accommodation process is interactive and collaborative and depends upon open communication between the employee and the ELCFH to ensure that needs are understood, safely addressed, and evaluated in a timely manner. The ELCFH values pregnant employees and new parents, and affirms their right to equitable treatment, a safe working environment, and access to necessary accommodations. No employee will be disadvantaged in hiring, job assignments, pay, promotion, training, benefits, or employment status because of pregnancy, childbirth, lactation needs, or related medical conditions.

Under the PWFA and related laws, the ELCFH prohibits any form of discrimination or retaliation against an employee or applicant due to: pregnancy or suspected pregnancy, a pregnancy-related medical condition (e.g., morning sickness, gestational diabetes, postpartum depression), lactation or the need to express breast milk, and a request for or use of reasonable accommodation. Accommodations apply to all qualified employees, regardless of tenure or full-time/part-time status, whenever known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or lactation arise. When an employee's pregnancy or pregnancy-related condition necessitates adjustments, the ELCFH will work with the employee to identify appropriate accommodations. These accommodations aim to support health and safety while enabling the employee to perform essential job functions. Standard accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

1. More frequent, longer, or flexible restroom breaks, including as-needed access without discipline.
2. Modification of a no-food/no-drink policy to allow water or light snacks when medically appropriate.
3. Provision of seating or opportunities to sit, even in positions that typically require standing, where operationally feasible.
4. Temporary adjustment of lifting limits consistent with the essential functions and safety requirements of the job.
5. Flexibility in work hours, such as slight schedule adjustments to accommodate medical appointments, morning sickness, or fatigue.
6. Permission to carry pregnancy-related medical supplies, such as water bottles, prenatal vitamins, or glucose monitors.

7. Additional accommodations may be considered on a case-by-case basis, including:
8. Job restructuring that temporarily reallocates marginal duties.
9. Light duty or modified tasks.
10. Temporary reassignment to a vacant role of similar pay and status.
11. Modified or part-time schedules.
12. Temporary telework, if compatible with job duties.
13. Acquisition or modification of tools, equipment, or protective gear.

When certification is necessary, the ELCFH will only request documentation directly related to the accommodation sought.

Employees who are breastfeeding or expressing milk after childbirth are entitled to specific accommodations under the FLSA and PWFA. The ELCFH supports lactating parents through the following provisions: up to one year after the birth of the child, employees will be provided with reasonable break time whenever needed to express breast milk. Breaks may be taken multiple times per workday and may vary in length and timing based on individual needs. Employees may use paid break time for pumping; time beyond paid breaks may be unpaid unless otherwise required by state law or ELCFH policy.

The ELCFH will provide access to a clean, private, lockable space for expressing breast milk that: is not a bathroom, is shielded from view and intrusion, contains a chair, flat surface, electrical outlet, and appropriate privacy features, has nearby access to running water, and provides refrigeration or a safe alternative for the storage of expressed milk.

Employees should notify Human Resources or their supervisor as soon as they are aware of a pregnancy-related need, anticipated limitation, or lactation requirement. Notification may be verbal or written. Early communication helps ensure timely support, but employees may request accommodation at any time.

Any medical information obtained will be kept confidential and stored separately from personnel files, disclosed only to individuals with a legitimate business need. The ELCFH will provide accommodations unless doing so would create an undue hardship, meaning significant difficulty or expense in relation to the ELCFH's size, resources, and operations.

Requests will be evaluated individually, considering:

- The employee's job duties.
- The duration, frequency, and nature of the needed accommodation.
- Operational, staffing, and safety requirements.
- Availability of alternative accommodations.

If an accommodation cannot be granted due to undue hardship, the ELCFH will work to identify and implement a suitable alternative. No employee will experience adverse treatment (including discipline, demotion, schedule changes, reduced hours, or termination) because they:

- requested or used an accommodation.
- are pregnant or experiencing a pregnancy-related condition.
- are expressing milk or requesting lactation breaks.
- participated in the interactive process.
- asserted rights under the PWFA or other applicable laws.

Any employee who believes they have been subjected to retaliation should report their concern to the ELCFH Executive Director immediately.

6. NEW POLICY: AI Wearable Devices policy- recommended by Krizner Group

Employees are reminded of the ELCFH prohibition of unauthorized recordings in the workplace and of the ELCFH Artificial Intelligence policy. Any wearable AI devices must be used in accordance with all of ELCFH workplace policies. Wearable devices for the purpose of this policy are those devices which are worn by an individual and have the capability of capturing photographs or videos of the wearer's surroundings, have a microphone which can pick up voice commands and ambient sound, and a means of providing a response with audio or video feedback, such as Meta or AI glasses or lapel pins. It does not include smart watches, smart rings or other devices that are worn to monitor health or fitness.

7. ~~(Drug Free Workplace Policy- 5.6)) Medical Marijuana:~~ Medical Marijuana policy recommendation provided by Krizner Group is listed below

~~The possession and/or use of medical marijuana is prohibited on ELCFH premises. If an applicant or employee with a legal referral for marijuana (for the treatment of a medical condition) tests positive based on the substance limits for the drug test, it will be reported by the lab as a "positive drug test" and will be treated in accordance with all other positive drug tests. Employees and applicants shall be given an opportunity to provide any information relevant to the test, including identification of currently or recently used prescription or non-prescription medications as well as any legal referral for marijuana use for the treatment of a medical condition. There are no additional exceptions for applicants or employees with legal referrals for marijuana.~~

The ELCFH recognizes that the standards related to the use of marijuana for both medical and recreational purposes are an evolving threshold and seeks to address this issue consistent with the legal requirements for Florida, which has legalized the use of medical marijuana. The ELCFH is prepared to provide an accommodation to any employee associated with the legally compliant use of marijuana for medicinal purposes, pursuant to statutory requirements and with proper advance notice of a legal prescription for medicinal marijuana from a licensed medical professional. Employees will be required to provide documentation to demonstrate compliance with all statutory requirements and shall use such medication in strict compliance with the prescription under the following conditions. These conditions are to ensure the health and safety of the ELCFH's customers, employees, and vendors. Failure to comply with the following conditions may result in discipline, up to and including termination, and may prevent an employee from being able to receive benefits under Florida's Workers' Compensation laws.

1. An employee seeking an accommodation for use of medical marijuana, including deviation from the ELCFH's drug free workplace program, must provide prior to any testing that may result in a positive finding documentation that the employee has received a legally compliant prescription for the use of medical marijuana, including copies of his/her card or certificate to the Executive Director/ Human Resources designee. If an employee subject to this policy ever loses his/her certification, the employee will notify Executive Director/ Human Resources designee within 24 hours.

2. No employee may use medicinal (or any other form of) marijuana while performing any work for the ELCFH.

3. No employee will appear at work impaired in any way and, if use of medicinal marijuana at or close to an employee's scheduled work period leads to an impaired state, that employee will leave work immediately and remain away from work until he/she is no longer impaired in any manner. Further, any employee found to be impaired at work will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

4. No employee will use or supervise the use of motor vehicles, machinery, or powered equipment of the ELCFH while using or impaired by his/her medication.

8. **Two additional policies were also provided and are currently under discussion by the Management Team. These will be brought back to the next Administrative Committee meeting:**

    - Employee Communications Limitation: discussion ongoing about use of texting with employees for function such as calling in sick/ needed personal time.

    - Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence- two options were presented by Krizner Group for discussion. The management team is currently discussing both to determine the best use of AI within the agency while also aligning the DEL/ DOE Policy.

Item 3: ELCFH Bylaws (Excerpts) – updates/ revision required:

5.1 MEETING NOTIFICATIONS

5.1.1 Notice of Coalition Board meetings, including the agenda, will be made by mail, fax, or by electronic means to each Coalition Board member no less than ~~five (5)~~ seven (7) calendar days prior to the meeting date.

6.2 STANDING COMMITTEES

6.2.4 The Quality Committee will assess the school readiness needs of the communities served and ensure that provider training, child care ~~environmental~~ program assessments, child screenings and assessments, parent involvement, community development and awareness, and any other needed quality activities are provided on a regular basis.

8.1 RECORD KEEPING

Correct and complete books and records of the proceedings of the Coalition Board, its committees, and its financial accounts will be maintained at the office of the appointed fiscal agent for a period of five (5) years from the submission date of the final reimbursement request for that grant year, or until the resolution of any audit findings or any litigation related to the Agreement and will be subject to inspection by any member of the Coalition Board or the public at any reasonable time. The ELCFH will keep an accurate record of the names and addresses of the members.