

**DAVIDSON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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**Davidson County Department of Social Services
Board Meeting Minutes
April 23, 2019**

Board Members Present

Mr. Andy Morris; Mrs. Karen Watford; Mrs. Jane Murphy; Mr. Todd Yates

Others in Attendance

Mr. Dale Moorefield; Mr. Scott Craver; Mrs. Elizabeth Huff; Mrs. Susan Craig; Mrs. Caroline Hedrick; Ms. Sheri Woodyard, Ms. Michelle Swaim, Ms. Margaret Graham- Muhammad, Ms. Patricia Hart, Ms. Kim Craver, Ms. Olinithia Tate-Fielding, and Mr. Ezekiel Gump

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:16 p.m. by Mr. Andy Morris. An invocation was offered by Mr. Morris.

Oath of Office

Commissioner Todd Yates was sworn in on the Board of Social Services and will complete the term of former Commissioner Steve Jarvis who resigned due to his duty of serving as a State Representative. This appointment ends June 30, 2019. Mr. Keith Biddy from the County Attorney's office presided over the giving of the Oath of Office.

Adoption of Agenda

Mrs. Karen Watford made a motion to approve the Agenda. Mrs. Jane Murphy seconded the motion. The Agenda was approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Mrs. Karen Watford made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 26, 2019 meeting. Mrs. Jane Murphy seconded this motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Address

There was no public address. Mr. Dale Moorefield took an opportunity to introduce the CPS supervisors who were present for the Child Protective Services Program Focus.

Management Report

Mrs. Caroline Hedrick provided the expenditure report for expenses as of March 31, 2019. Seventy-five percent of the fiscal year has lapsed and the Department has expended 68% of the total budget compared to 69% for the same time frame last fiscal year. Areas of overspending were reviewed. Mrs. Hedrick shared that all Department expenses are paid up front by the County, then reimbursement requests are submitted. Reimbursement percentages vary for each program.

Mr. Dale Moorefield shared the vacancy report. There are a total of 10 vacancies on the report; however, offers have been accepted for some positions and there 7 vacancies as of today. Mr. Moorefield shared the reasons for vacancies, some of which were internal job changes. The part-time CSST position became vacant due to this person accepting the full-time CSST position. All positions are posted. The Department's turnover rate is normally around 9%; however, it has been slightly higher due to an improved economy and retirements.

Mrs. Elizabeth Huff gave the Medicaid/Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)/Fraud report. The top section of the report shows accuracy rates for work completed and the bottom section shows worker productivity. The County is normally well above a 95% accuracy rate in all areas. Mrs. Huff gave an explanation of FNS normal and FNS emergency food stamp applications. Normal applications must be processed in 30 days and emergency applications within 7 days. Different classes of Medicaid/SA were described. Mrs. Huff highlighted that the larger number of benefits issued for January 2019 was due to benefits being issued early for the months of both January and February during the government shutdown. All recipients will be on their normal cycle for May. The Department has 2 program integrity workers who work on fraud claims for Food Stamps, Medicaid, Childcare or any program in which benefits were received for which a client was not eligible. Reimbursement is normally sufficient to pay for these positions. Declines in the number of food and nutrition cases are due to the economy improving and applicants not qualifying for benefits; especially with no longer having an ABAWD waiver.

Mrs. Huff shared that the Work First Family Assistance Program (WFFA) was formerly called the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Program, which changed with Welfare Reform in 1997 and added an employment component. Caseloads dropped significantly with this reform change. WFFA recipients receive a monthly check and payment depends on the household size. Welfare Reform added an employment component, which requires participants to be involved in a work activity (interviews, job applications, and training, etc.), and this is why adults entering work and participation rate is tracked. The Department's contract with Goodwill Industries helps to teach soft skills to participants in order to assist them with gainful employment. Mrs. Huff also shared relative caregiver requirements, which do not require an employment component (child only cases). She expressed that years ago, benefits were received with no accountability and the current program is based on pay after performance.

Mrs. Huff reported that Davidson County's Child Care Subsidy Block Grant allocation was over \$6.4 million dollars for the current fiscal year; however, the State reverted over \$1 million due to overall State overspending. This reversion was largely due to parent fees being waived for approximately 3-4 months in North Carolina counties affected by hurricanes this year and reverted funds were reallocated to other counties, which were above their spending co-efficient. Davidson County was underspending; however, the State reverted funds and mandated that counties implement a waiting list. The County's current spending co-efficient is slightly above 100% and attrition should balance spending by fiscal year end. Effective April 15, there were 83 children on a waiting list. Childcare subsidy has been on NC Fast for just over a year and reports

are starting to become available; however, child care statistics are a couple months behind due to lack of reports available through NC Fast.

Emergency Financial Programs were reviewed by Mrs. Huff. Emergency Assistance is for individuals who may have an eviction or disconnection notice for utilities and are in crisis. General Assistance funds are all county money and are a safety net for individuals who may not be eligible for other programs. Food vouchers are paid from General Assistance funds and CPS staff use this fund when they find that there is no food in the home. Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) funds assist individuals and families who are experiencing a heating or cooling related crisis. A household is considered to be in a crisis if it is currently experiencing or is in danger of experiencing a life threatening or health related emergency and sufficient, timely and appropriate assistance is not available from any other source. Spending dropped this fiscal year as we have experienced milder weather. The Share the Warmth allocation comes from residents rounding up on their Piedmont Natural Gas bills and funds must be used for heating bills. LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program) is a one-time program to help offset costs of high heating bills. LIEAP applications are taken December 1 – March 31 or until the funds are exhausted. Emergency Assistance (AFDC-EA) is for households with a child under age 18 in the home to help stop an eviction or to keep utilities from being disconnected. All emergency payments are made directly to vendors.

Applications are currently being taken for the Kiwanis Kiddie Camp. A public service announcement has been made. Children ages 7-11 are eligible to attend and there are no income qualifications. Sixty-six children per week may attend camp and camp is offered three weeks during the summer months.

Mr. Scott Craver shared the Child Support Collections report. All categories increased for March. Typically, tax intercepts allow us to divert child support owed and it is taken from tax refunds. Child support is measured by State goals listed at the top of the report. The goal for total collections has increased annually and high collection months are needed for the remainder of the year in order to meet this goal. Cost effectiveness is calculated by the State. Mr. Craver shared a State report which reflects Davidson County ranking 9th in the state for child support collections. The State average for cost effectiveness is \$4.50 compared to Davidson County's average of \$8.45.

Mr. Scott Craver shared the Child Protective Services (CPS) report on behalf of Katrina McMasters. He reported stats were constant except for a decline in abuse cases. The majority of cases for the month of March were related to neglect. March was the second highest month for the year in closing in-home cases. There are eight caseworkers for in-home services. Mr. Craver noted that these are complex cases. Nine cases were taken to juvenile court and 19 were taken into custody.

Mrs. Susan Craig provided an update for permanency planning. Ninety-one children have been taken into custody since July with 50 children coming into care between July and December and 41 in the past 3 months. The number of children in custody has increased by 39 children over the same period last fiscal year. Commissioner Yates inquired about the average stay of custody; however, there is no average. Mrs. Craig shared that we are seeing an increase in mental health placements. Of the children in custody, there are currently 38 children with relative placements and 6 with court approved caregivers. Once a child turns 18, they may choose to remain in foster care up to age 21. There are currently 7 children in this program and 6 live on their own. DSS helps to determine a safe living arrangement for the 18-21 population and they can receive up to \$634 per month toward rent. Mrs. Craig explained the adoption process and the impact on cases closing. The Department offers foster care licensing classes (MAPP classes) and 16 foster

families are finishing the class. The class is a 10-week class and offered 3 times per year. Mrs. Craig shared a handout regarding Foster Care Sunday which is to promote the foster care training classes offered by the Department.

Mrs. Craig shared that Adult Services reports declined slightly and the number accepted decreased to 15. Twenty-nine adult protective services cases are open. The Department currently has guardianship of 87 disabled adults/wards, which does not include slots for 40 wards under the guardianship contract with Hope for the Future. There are currently 37 wards being served by the contract and the Department only pays the cost of slots that are filled. Mrs. Craig shared that the Department has received 21 calls year to date for assistance with unclaimed bodies. The Department attempts to locate families, find other ways to pay for burial costs, or arrange to donate the body to anatomy schools before absorbing the cost of cremation, which is not a reimbursable expense.

Old Business

There was no Old Business.

New Business

Board Updates and Appointments

Mr. Andy Morris expressed at the last meeting that he is not seeking another term on the Board. Mr. Moorefield relayed that the Social Services Commission has not yet responded to his calls regarding nominations received for Mr. Morris' seat on the Board. Applications were due by April 16. (Since the meeting, the Social Services Commission reported that no one had placed themselves into nomination for the position and it is reposted through 5/31/2019 and this is the case in 40 counties.) Commissioner Todd Yates is finishing a 3-month term vacated by Representative Steve Jarvis and this seat will be appointed by the County Commissioners. Mr. Moorefield shared his appreciation for Commissioner Yates filling this seat and saw this as an opportunity for him to learn more about the Agency.

Mr. Moorefield updated the Board regarding the 2019-2020 budget request. The initial budget request included 11 positions with a 21% increase in the budget. Based on a meeting with county management, 4 of 5 on hold positions were requested to be reclassified with one on hold position staying at the same classification with revised duties. Positions reclassified cost more than the on hold positions as they are at higher pay grades; however, the reclassified positions also draw more reimbursement. Three additional positions are recommended in the services areas for a total of 8 additional positions in our services area for the upcoming budget. Increased complex cases, understaffing, and staff burnout are reasons for positions requests in addition to transitioning into the NC Fast system. Poor performance of NC Fast P4 for Child Welfare has created introduced State Legislation to put NC Fast P4 on hold. The security guard contract was not approved for recommendation to the Commissioners; however, Mr. Moorefield has offered to pay for a portion of the current deputy's salary if time is allocated to DSS, which is approximately 30% reimbursable. Discussion was held regarding safety and panic buttons, both in the office and out in the field. Discussion of panic buttons will be on the next Facilities Committee agenda.

Record Destruction

Eighty-two out of date Child Welfare Services records have been identified for destruction. Mr. Moorefield requested approval for these records to be destroyed. Mrs. Murphy made a motion to

approve the destruction of records and Mrs. Watford seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Program Focus – Child Protective Services

Due to time remaining for the meeting, Mr. Moorefield asked Child Protective Services (CPS) supervisors to adjust their presentation and share their experiences in CPS. Mr. Ezekiel Gump shared that CPS staff see the families at their worst. He expressed that the workers are overburdened and overworked and the Department is understaffed. Workers face constant stress with the severity of cases while dealing with the drug epidemic, limited transportation, and limited resources and treatments, which is all progressively getting worse each month. Per State data, the Department is well below where it should be in regard to work and caseload ratios. Social Work staff are working hard to meet goals despite the State rapidly changing expectations. Mrs. Kim Craver shared statistics of abuse reports assigned as investigations. Abuse reports have worsened over the years as the drug epidemic has increased. In March 2017, 9% of abuse reports were assigned as investigations; 12% during March 2018 and 21% during March 2019. This increase led to the development of the CPS Forensics Investigations Team, which collaborates, with law enforcement, attorney's offices, etc. and a lot of time is devoted to working these cases. Mrs. Margaret Graham-Muhamad added that from January – March 2018, only 11 children were taken into care as compared to 41 for the same time period this year. She added that the majority of cases are substance abuse related and/or the parents abandon the children. Mrs. Michelle Swaim shared that the number of reports taken has increased each year with 2,390 CPS reports taken year to date as compared to a total of 2,459 in 2013-2014 and 2,829 in 2017-2018. An influx of reports are normally received in May from the school systems before children are released for the summer months. She shared that the Department also "assists" other counties and they reciprocate, as well as, handling conflict of interest cases, which takes a worker to another county to work investigations. An increase of substance-affected infants is also being seen. The Department receives calls from hospitals and intake receives the referral and works with the Health Department to complete the referral before it is screened. From September 2017 to June 2018, 44 of 52 reports of substance affected infants were accepted. Year to date, 68 reports have been received with 61 accepted. Supervisors struggle to balance the caseloads for workers due to the varied cases and high demands and things are not improving. Per State standards, assessors should be assigned 10-11 cases per work week and 6 families per in-home worker. State standards were set many years ago, well before the opioid epidemic and increased case complexity, and does not take mandated changes into consideration. Supervisors attempt to be creative with ensuring visits are made while teaming up with other social worker staff. Concerns regarding the upcoming implementation of NC Fast were also expressed. Discussions held emphasize the need for increased staff in the upcoming budgets.

Recently, the Child Welfare Services Manual was modified multiple times and it mandates increased frequency of visits and specifies location of visits. Mr. Morris shared that last year the State placed pressure on local Departments of Social Services to support the modified program, approve, and sign a MOU for HB630 with a quick turnaround. The State threatened taking funds if not returned by the deadline.

Commissioner Yates expressed that he, along with Commissioner Watford, would like to spend the day with CPS staff to observe and see what they do on a daily basis. Supervisors were very appreciative of this gesture and shared an open invitation to arrange such observations.

Date of Next Meeting

The next DSS Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 28, at 2 p.m. to begin a walking tour of our Agency facilities. We will begin at 211 W. Colonial Drive, before touring our area at Family Services of Davidson County, and ending at the Davidson County Governmental Center prior to our regular 4:15 pm start at the first floor of the Governmental Center in Lexington, Conference Room D.

Adjournment

Mrs. Murphy made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mrs. Watford seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:06 pm.

Minutes submitted by Dale Moorefield