

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
BOARD MINUTES  
Regular Scheduled Meeting  
Thursday, June 25, 2020  
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on June 25, 2020 conducted by phone as a result of COVID-19. Prior and Public Notice of the meeting was given in accordance with G.S. 143-318.12.

Board members present for today's meeting were Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman, Ms. Angela Mainor, Mr. Jesse Dowe, and Mr. Gary Ange. Ms. Ila Davis was present for a portion of the meeting. Ms. Susan Thigpen, DSS Director, was also present for the meeting. The invocation for today's meeting was given by Ms. Susan Thigpen.

No changes or amendments were added to the agenda and there were no public comments received.

**Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Mr. Gary Ange and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and minutes were approved for the May 28, 2020 meeting.

**Old Business**

All benefits have now been loaded to cards for P-EBT benefits except for a small portion of children that were left off the original data received from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Those benefits will be loaded in the near future. To date, the agency has followed up on 129 cards that were returned as undeliverable by contacting the phone numbers provided in the report and the school system in order to obtain a current address. We expect to continue getting more of these in the next few weeks. P-EBT will provide more than 3.6 million dollars in benefits for families with school aged children in Duplin County public schools. Families do have up to one year to use these benefits.

All computers have now been returned to NC FAST and employees are able to use their own computers and printers. The agency does not have the server up and running yet but that does not impact the agency's ability to provide full services to the public at this time.

A tour of schools to be utilized as shelters was conducted last week by Duplin County Schools staff, Health Department staff, Emergency Management Deputy Director Matt Barwick, and this agency's director to identify space and plans for sheltering to include space for isolating symptomatic and COVID positive residents. BF Grady has been identified as a possible fifth shelter since the capacity is significantly lower than in previous years due to the requirements for social distancing. The four schools typically used has adequate space for 404 residents and opening BF Grady would provide space for 154 additional people.

**New Business**

**Budget Report** – The proposed budget for 2020-2021 was approved by the County Commissioners earlier in the month and the agency will monitor the two line items with significant reductions in order



to quickly respond with budget amendments if necessary. The new budget did include funds for a significant portion of the needed repairs to the agency. Insurance and Bonds was overspent for 2019-2020 but the agency was able to move funds to cover these expenses and this is one of the line items that can fluctuate from year to year and cannot be prevented through monitoring or reduction in coverage.

**Income Maintenance and Child Support** – Child Support Court has not been held since February 18<sup>th</sup>. Court was supposed to resume this week but was continued again. It will take the unit months to catch up and there are concerns about growing arrears that will make it more difficult for noncustodial parents to ever catch up on child support. Following the last cancellation, workers began reaching out to parents in an effort to establish Voluntary Order.

The state has also indicated that the annual MOU will not be developed until January 2021 and will cover the last six months of the state fiscal year. The MOU benchmarks for child support in 2020-21 will be significantly reduced since the state has opted to hold counties to the federal benchmark rather than the benchmarks established for incentive dollars. Agencies will continue to receive those measures as well in order to receive incentive dollars but no penalty or corrective action plan will be required as long as the federal benchmarks are met.

The state has requested Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) waivers for yearly interviews and automatic recertifications to be extended beyond June 30<sup>th</sup> but the USDA is not expected to approve it. This will have a significant impact on workload and the supervisors and program administrator will be meeting later to develop a strategy for ensuring that case requirements are met despite a large number of new workers with limited training.

**Personnel** – There are currently 15 vacancies in the agency with three of those positions remaining frozen at this time to include two PIA IV positions and the Maintenance position and two of those vacant positions have been filled with a pending start date. The continued vacancy for the Maintenance position has been challenging for the agency since this position has been responsible for performing the daily sanitation functions in response to COVID-19 and handles all maintenance and specific housekeeping issues that arise from day to day. The agency continues to advocate for posting this vacancy as quickly as possible. The agency has not received any new applications for the Child Welfare vacancies in the past several weeks although the Social Worker IV position is a continuous posting. Interviews for several vacant IMC positions were conducted over the past few days in the Community Room, which allows for adequate social distancing, and we expect that those five positions can be filled from this pool of applicants. Ms. Angela Mainor asked why interviews were being conducted in person since the director noted during the previous meeting that the virtual interviews had worked well. Ms. Susan Thigpen explained that face-to-face interviews are ideal and the number of applicants being interviewed makes it more challenging to utilize a virtual format. The agency continues to utilize the GoToMeeting format for other things such as supervisory staff meetings, Parenting Training, and other meetings.

**Child and Adult Services** – There were 29 screen ins and 19 screen outs in Child Welfare for the month of May. There were a total of 74 Assessments open and 50 In Home Services cases open; along with a total of 64 Adult Services cases. Both CPS and APS staff are working from home four days out of each week and are rotating one day in the office. All Services staff will be returning to the office on July 1<sup>st</sup> as the agency has implemented more stringent protocol regarding masks and social distancing.



Issues had also been identified with some workers not utilizing time to work on pending cases and handling cases differently whenever they are not working in the office. Most visits are still being done virtually as allowed by state and federal guidelines. Staff meetings will continue to be conducted virtually despite everyone being in the office in order to maintain social distancing. During the month of July, social workers and supervisors will be expected to focus on updating the necessary paperwork to track case decisions in the state system. Court has not been held for Child Welfare since February. The agency continues to make diligent efforts to partner with GAL and parent attorneys to obtain consent orders whenever possible. The agency has growing concerns about the impact these delays will have on permanency and reunification efforts.

### Director's Update

The agency continues to have several people out at any given time as a result of COVID-19, either as a result of direct exposure, being symptomatic, or testing positive. Supervisors are making adjustments to assignments as needed in order to minimize the impact of these absences. The agency continues to function as we have for the past few months with Economic Benefits supervisors meeting clients outside and utilizing the drop box for written communication and payments to the agency.

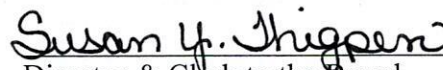
The Subsidized Childcare Waiting List Policy for the waiting list and prevention of overspending has been approved by NC division of Child Development and Early Education and also requires approval from the agency Board. Mr. Gary Ange moved to approve the policy and Mr. Jesse Dowe seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Ms. Angela Mainor dissenting and Ms. Ila Davis being absent from the vote.

The Energy Programs Outreach Plan requires yearly approval from the Board. There were no changes to the plan from last year. Duplin County consistently spends CIP and LIEAP funds. Mr. Gary Ange moved to approve the policy and Mr. Jesse Dowe seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Ms. Angela Mainor dissenting and Ms. Ila Davis being absent from the vote.

There are a number of bills in the General Assembly that could have a significant impact on Social Services to included Senate Bill 808 and Senate Bill 708. Directors across the state are concerned with portions of these bills and will be monitoring closely. Session Law 2020-4 includes supplemental payments to foster parents for the months of April – June in the amount of \$100.00 per month in addition to funds for essential worker pay and supplies. The state has not provided guidance to date as to how this will be implemented. Ms. Susan Thigpen will continue to monitor action within the General Assembly throughout the remainder of this short session.

Motion was made, seconded, and passed to adjourn the meeting until our next regular scheduled meeting to be held virtually on July 23, 2020 at 8:30.

  
Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman

  
Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: July 23 2020