

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
BOARD MINUTES  
Regular Scheduled Meeting  
Thursday, February 25, 2021  
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on February 25, 2021 conducted virtually 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 – chair, Ms. Ila Davis, Ms. Angela Mainor, Ms. Marzella Morrissey, and Mr. Jesse Dowe. 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 made to the agenda and there were no public comments received.

**Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Ms. Marzella Morrissey and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and minutes were approved for the January 28<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**New Business**

**Budget and Expenditures Report** – The budget currently reflects \$500.00 in overspending of COVID-Low Income Energy Assistance line item; however, the state has confirmed that they will be making the adjustment to move these expenses over to Low Income Home Energy Assistance. There are continued issues with getting the windows replaced. As of the last update, there were issues with the drafted contract and the county hopes to get it executed in the next few weeks. Repairs are also needed to the portico where water is coming in on both sides at the front of the room. The agency has been unable to move forward with these repairs due to expectations of the contract for windows being higher than initially thought.

**Income Maintenance and Child Support** – Ms. Susan Thigpen reviewed a new report that will be shared with Board members each month to show agency performance on the benchmarks for the Memorandum of Understanding with NCDHHS. Data will be provided each month to identify trends and potential issues in performance. Untimely cases in CIP, FNS, and WFFA are provided to supervisors each month to identify reasons for untimeliness and performance was adjusted to reflect those cases that are regulatory delays, rather than worker error and this does put the agency in compliance with all measures. The agency will continue to track these cases each month since untimeliness is unavoidable in these situations due to policy and regulations related to processing applications. Workers have been struggling over the past month with NC FAST running slowly. The state continues to work on correcting this problem but it has created a challenge for Income Maintenance staff since timeliness measures remain the same regardless of the data entry issues

created by NC FAST. Three consecutive months or five months within the 12-month period would require development of a corrective action plan and financial penalties would be placed on the county only after established plans and ongoing technical assistance from the state fail to provide improvement. Child support is a yearly measurement and the agency has already exceeded those benchmarks for the current SFY.

Duplin County Social Services will be starting a year-long review of Medicaid cases that will include 10 approved and 10 denied cases each month will beginning in April and continuing for 10 consecutive months. Results will be provided each month to the county to allow for corrections in a timely manner to minimize paybacks and to address systemic issues.

**Personnel** – There are currently 12 vacancies including two that are awaiting clearance through county Human Resources. Beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>, one of our current social workers will be moving over to the recently vacated on-call position and this will continue to provide some relief for social workers who will only be responsible for rotating responsibility for on-call on Saturdays and Sundays. Filling positions continues to be difficult as a result of limited applications from qualified individuals.

**Social Work Programs** – The agency is contracting with Vanguard for a supervisor to fill in for a recent vacancy. This person will be able to provide some relief to supervisors and social workers until that position is filled and while we work diligently to allow supervisors to take off bonus time that has accumulated. This individual does have experience training new supervisors so she may be utilized for a period of time after the position has been filled. Caseload sizes are currently at or only slightly above guidelines for all units. There has been a significant increase in the number of cases requiring CME/CFE in the past month and this has impacted the timeliness of assessments being completed. Mr. Jesse Dowe continues to express concern about the Social Worker IV positions not being utilized as trainers. Ms. Susan Thigpen pointed out that one of these positions is currently vacant and the trainers had been pulled into rotation for caseloads during the time there had been significant turnover and caseload sizes were particularly high. The Board and agency director will need to discuss these positions further in the upcoming months to determine how they can best be utilized at this time. If these positions are maintained as trainer positions, clarification regarding how these social workers will be trained and who will be responsible for the training will also be needed.

Board members asked about the number of children placed in congregate care settings and/or placed out of county. Ms. Susan Thigpen explained that there are limited resources within the county and the majority of foster children in care at this time are older youth with behavioral health needs. Although Social Services and private agencies license family foster homes, these youths often require specialized placements that are not available locally. The agency does make diligent efforts to avoid congregate care settings although there are some situations when this may be the best option for the youth based on needs and placement options.

## **Director's Update**


The director's evaluation was completed by the Board. Ms. Susan Thigpen highlighted some of the events of 2020 to include ransomware and COVID. Staff have continued to adjust, at times on a daily basis, to the changes in policy and service delivery as a result of COVID and as reflected in the MOU data, have continued to meet state requirements.

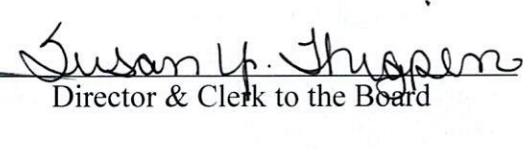
There are no recommendations for reclassification in the 2021-2022 budget year from Social Services. Caseload sizes will continue to be monitored to consider whether the trainer positions can be better utilized in that role or transitioned back to regular Social Worker IVs. The agency is requesting funds for iReception that will include a sign in/out program that can also be utilized by social workers to check in and out at residences to provide additional safety measures and will provide the various logs that are required for Economic Benefits programs and were lost whenever we were hit with ransomware. We will also be requesting Nessus, a security program required by IRS, to conduct vulnerability scans on a monthly basis. Maintenance costs for children and youth placed in congregate care settings will be increasing as of October 1, 2021 with the implementation of the federal Families First Prevention Services Act. This will result in an approximately 35% loss in revenue for these placements. Medicaid Expansion has been another program that has been identified for consideration in the next fiscal year but is not expected to require an increase in county funds if it is enacted. Medicaid Expansion would result in increased calls and clients in the agency, an increased number of applications and recertifications, and additional staff training needs but these additional expenses would be covered through state and federal funds.

North Carolina has been approved for P-EBT for the entire school year and the state began issuing benefits last week. All students in Duplin County Schools will meet the requirement of the school being closed or has been operating with reduced attendance for at least 5 consecutive days during the 2020 to 2021 school year and benefits will be received for any portion of the month that the student is learning in a "remote learning mode" (all virtual instruction) or in a "hybrid learning mode" (combination of virtual and in-person instruction) during the month. It is the state's goal to first issue P-EBT benefits retroactively to students who were eligible between the months of October to December 2020 as well as all kindergarten students and students transferring into the county that did not receive benefits for August and September as a result of being excluded from the data whenever those benefits were previously issued. Notices will be sent to eligible households notifying them of their eligibility through the mail. These benefits will be issued a month at a time over several days beginning the end of last week to those who already have an EBT card (FNS or P-EBT). Those who do not have the EBT card and are eligible during these months should anticipate receiving cards in through the mail service in late February or early March 2021. For the rest of the 2020-2021 school year, benefits will be issued retroactively on a monthly basis starting in March 2021 as long as the student remains eligible. The benefits received in March will be for January and February 2021 and will also be issued a month at a time and staggered over several days. Benefits will continue to be retroactively provided every month as long as the student remains eligible. Benefits are in the amount of \$115.94 for remote learning and

\$61.38 for hybrid learning from August – December 2020. Benefits for hybrid learning will be calculated at a rate of \$6.82 x the statewide average of days of remote learning.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Marzella Morrissey and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on March 25, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. The next meeting will be held at Social Services in the Community Room, allowing for adequate social distancing.

  
Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman

  
Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: March 25 2021