

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Special Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, January 28, 2021
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on January 28, 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 Ms. Ila Davis, Ms. Angela Mainor, Ms. Marzella Morrisey, 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. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Ila Davis and minutes were approved for the December 17th meeting.

Orientation to Social Services

Ms. Marzella Morrisey was appointed to the Board by the Duplin County Commissioners and took her oath of office on January 15, 2021. Program Manager Christy Jones and Program Administrator Monique Jones provided a slide presentation on the programs provided through this agency.

New Business

Budget Report –The agency will be requesting a budget amendment at the next Commissioner's Meeting in order to move forward with Imprivata – a system intended to increase security and minimize the possibility of ransomware or viruses. Social Services has incurred additional expenses throughout the year to address security needs identified and expect to see significant increases to the budget in this line item because of the additional programs and security features that are being implemented. Professional Services and IV-D Professional Services reflect much lower spending than budgeted but it is important to note that these line items include attorney's fees for Child Support Court and Children and Adult Services and the Court being closed for so much of the current fiscal year has resulted in a significant decrease in spending. It will be important to ensure that these line items are not cut or are potentially increased in the next budget year despite limited spending since there will likely be an increased need for attorney time over several months as a result of catching up on cases.

Income Maintenance and Child Support – The decision has been made for Duplin County Courts to remain closed at this time at least through February. The Child Support Supervisor will be implementing a strategy to increase collections that was utilized in NV and resulted in an

increase of 3-5% in collections. Child Support staff are currently cross training in preparation for one worker retiring in 2021 and to ensure that vacancies will not have a significant impact on benchmarks. Despite the challenges for collections without Court support, the Child Support Unit did collect more than \$5 million for the children and families of Duplin County over the past year.

The state has been approved to provide a 15% increase in FNS benefits for all recipients from January – June and P-EBT benefits will also be available for the entire school year. The state has not developed the process for issuing these benefits but is expected to finalize plans in February and benefits will be retroactive to October since benefits have already been issued for most recipients for August and September. There were issues across the state with newly enrolled students not receiving benefits so children enrolled in kindergarten and newly transferred students into Duplin County schools will receive benefits for August and September as well.

A recent review of employees confirms that 37% of IMC workers are currently on work-against status, meaning they have not been employed in that position long enough to fully qualify as an IMC II. This lack of experience does increase risks to the agency for potential audit errors and paybacks despite second party reviews.

The agency continues to maintain a waiting list as mandated by the state for subsidized childcare. The state will be reallocating funds in the next month so the current spending coefficient of more than 130% should be brought down to 100%, so the county will not have any financial responsibility for subsidized childcare. Duplin Christian Outreach Ministries was recently able to obtain a grant for childcare services and Social Services will be collaborating closely with them in developing criteria for utilization of the funds and will be providing referrals for the financial assistance. These benefits will be invaluable in providing short term assistance with daycare for newly employed parents and will also be utilized to provide short term daycare services for families involved in child welfare when only short-term arrangements are needed. These funds will likely be available for up to four weeks for qualifying applicants.

The MOU with the state becomes effective this month and the agency will be able to obtain monthly data on the measures in order to address concerns in a timely manner. The MOU was not implemented from July – December 2020 as a result of COVID and related challenges.

Personnel – There are currently 11 vacancies across the agency. There have been no applications received for the Program Integrity position for several months and we are currently exploring the possibility of moving that position over to Child Support or an IMCIII position to provide more oversight based on a continuing increase in the number of monitoring reviews and audits.

There have been no resignations to date in 2021 and one new hire. Orientation continues for new employees but is reduced to once a month whenever there have been only 1-2 new hires since the last meeting.

Social Work Programs – There have been no significant changes in Intakes over the past few months. Assessment caseloads currently remain at or slightly above guidelines and all In Home

Services workers are within guidelines at this time. There are currently 46% of our social workers that are in work against status, meaning they are not fully qualified as a Social Worker IV.

CPS and Adult Services workers have been rotating weeks in the office and working from home since the first week in January due to the increased number of COVID positive tests. At this point the plan is to continue this until February 15th and reassess at that time. There is currently an on-call social worker that has provided some relief for our staff; however, she has been taken off evening shift for a few weeks due to some issues but should be returning to a 3:00 – 11:00 shift soon.

Wards have been receiving vaccines throughout the month. Decisions for vaccination were made with the individual whenever appropriate and family members were consulted whenever the individual was not able to make the decision.

Director's Update

Remaining supervisors will be participating in the Assessing Belongingness and Fostering a Culture of Belonging training in the spring being offered through OSHR. This training included valuable information that is being used to focus on ways to develop a culture of belonging. Focus will be on both agency-wide and team efforts to monitor for behaviors that inhibit belongingness and to establish a culture of belonging.

The county has not decided what the evaluation process for county employees will look like yet and the management team is exploring the possibility of creating some type of 360 evaluation addressing supervisory oversight if this is not included in the county's requirements. There has been a delay in scheduling training with the Lenoir County Social Services director on supervisory skills due to the increase in COVID cases across the state and the DSS community room currently being used as a call center. Headsets with microphones have been purchased for all employees and agency-wide meetings will resume virtually as soon as these have been issued.

Child welfare and Adult Services staff are currently identified as Phase 3 for COVID vaccines; however, our Adult Services workers have been prioritized due to the state's decision to reinstate requirements for monitoring and assessing complaints against facilities. There is no current guidance on when the rest of DSS will receive vaccines. The agency continues to take precautions to minimize the possibility of spread within the agency to include mask requirements, limiting clients to five designated offices with Plexiglass barriers, and daily self-reporting of any COVID related symptoms. The number of employees out as a result of COVID has declined and is beginning to stabilize. The agency did return to curbside service during the first few weeks in January but has resumed allowing clients into the agency while making diligent efforts to meet client needs either by phone, mail, or outside. CARE packages purchased with Cares Act Funds for older residents of Duplin County are being used and have been helpful in providing much needed assistance to individuals struggling with COVID. Ms. Angela Mainor indicated that she would like the department to have someone professional to sanitize the building. Ms. Susan Thigpen noted that maintenance has been regularly spraying the entire building using the same solution that has been used in other departments but the number of employees in this building obviously increases the risk of infection regardless of the measures taken.

The states continues to move forward with Medicaid Transformation and recent data indicates that approximately 85% of the clients utilizing NEMT services will remain on the standard plan for Medicaid for 2021-2022 so there should not be a significant decrease in the work load for these workers as of July 1st. Although the PHPs will assume responsibility for coordinating transportation for those clients that move to managed care, counties expect that there will be a period of transition during which much of the responsibility will fall on the county to coordinate with PHPs and ensure that critical appointments are made. There will not be anyone staging in the agency to assist recipients with questions regarding the selection of a PHP but there will be a call center operating from 7am – 5pm Monday thru Saturday and the call center will move to 12 hours 7 days a week beginning on March 15th for the enrollment period.

A motion was made by Ms. Angela Mainor and seconded by Ms. Marzella Morrisey and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on February 25, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.

Mike Wallace Susan Y. Shippens
Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: February 25 2021