

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Regular Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, April 23, 2020
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on April 23, 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, Mr. Jesse Dowe, Ms. Angela Mainor, Ms. Ila Davis, and Mr. Gary Ange. 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 during the Public Comments section of the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made and seconded and minutes were approved for the February 27, 2020 meeting.

Old Business

The agency has ordered more than \$138,000 in equipment that will be necessary in order for the agency to have a secure network and be able to communicate with the county network. The process of installing new equipment and connecting with the county network should begin in late May. The agency continues to use Surface Pros in the Services Units and are continuing to utilize laptops borrowed from NC FAST at this time. The agency is hoping to bring up the Non-Emergency Medical Transport (NEMT) Unit up within the agency this week so they can start entering backlogged trips that program from the office rather than going over to the Transportation Department.

New Business

Budget Report – Expenditures appear to remain on track on this time. There is currently 36.74% of the budget remaining for 2019-2020. It has been challenging over the past few months since the Administrative Officer did not have access to the general ledger. Deposits from January and February's 1571 deposits have not been updated in the general ledger. In addition, the loss of our payroll system resulted in the agency being unable to claim reimbursement for salaries on the 1571.

Income Maintenance and Child Support – The agency has seen a significant increase in FNS applications and expect this increase to continue for some time. Applications have risen from 114 in February to 385 applications in the first 21 days of April. Since FNS is regulated by the USDA, there have been limited modifications to the program requirements. The state is also predicting an increase in Medicaid applications beginning in the next month or two and many of the applicants are expected to qualify since the state has lifted many of the restrictions for that program. The state has also approved automatic recertifications for both programs during the COVID-19 crisis. It is possible that the county will not meet the established benchmarks for child support as a result of COVID-19. The state has already indicated that there will be no financial penalties for any areas that do not meet the

benchmarks and this additional set back may further impact the state's consideration of the MOU. Many parents are not working and court has been closed until at least June. This will result in a significant delay in getting cases calendared for the establishment and enforcement of child support orders. Staff are being shuffled between units as needed in order to meet the needs of increased applications.

Personnel – There are currently nine vacancies in the agencies and hiring has been delayed due to malware issues and the current hiring freeze. The county manager is approving positions to be filled on a case by case basis at this time. The agency is exploring the possibility of conducting remote interviews through Face Time or video chat. There have been 10 resignations in 2020, including two retirements.

Child and Adult Services – The agency has seen a significant decrease in CPS reports as well as a decrease in APS reports over the past month. Courts will be closed until June 1st so the agency has been conducting calls with GAL and agency attorney to evaluate the possibility of consent orders whenever possible and getting cases before a judge when hearings are needed. The agency is working diligently to ensure that court closures do not delay permanency for children in agency custody. Workers are currently rotating days in the office to ensure that direct exposure by one employee doesn't result in an entire unit being quarantined. Workers have been productive working from home and have been able to complete some of their older cases needing documentation.

All backlog cases for QA/Trainers have now been turned in but there were some missing items that will need to be completed in the near future. Ms. Angela Mainor asked that the director start providing the number of cases remaining in each supervisor's office awaiting review. A baseline will be provided at the next Board meeting and a plan for reducing this number will be developed with supervisors.

Adult Services are not visiting wards in facilities at this time as approved by the state. Contact is occurring with wards or facility staff by phone or video chats in order to assess the health and welfare of wards. Social workers are contacting placements for each of our wards, as well as all facilities in Duplin County to provide any needed assistance to facilities as they continue to work diligently to minimize potential outbreaks.

Director's Update

The agency lobby remains closed at this time although services continue. Supervisors are stationed in the lobby and meet with clients outside as needed. The drop box continues to be used and a table has been set up outside that has applications for all services and a sitting area if anyone is interested in completing an application while they are here. Clients may be brought into the agency lobby, where stations have been set up, for additional follow-up depending on the weather or needs as long as they report no symptoms of COVID-19 and no fever. CPS and APS are making visits as needed to ensure the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults. There have been significant modifications for requirements for visits so many face-to-face contacts are now being conducted by phone or video chat. All social workers have been provided with masks and gloves, as well as any supervisors that are meeting with clients at the agency. The agency frequently reminds staff of requirements for social distancing, supervisors are often conducting virtual meetings with employees even if everyone is in the office, and we have also emphasized the importance of social distancing

during evenings and weekend. All employees are asked to self-assess themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 and are asked to go to the Health Department immediately if they have any symptoms.

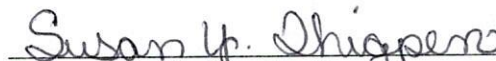
The USDA has approved P-EBT for FNS benefits that will be made available to all children enrolled in public school receiving free or reduced lunch. Duplin County is identified as an impoverished county so every student receives free lunch and will also qualify for these benefits. There is no application process for this benefit and the notification letters and cards will be sent out by the state and the county will be responsible for handling all mail that is returned. We expect that this will be a substantial amount of work for our workers since people often use the address of others in order to maintain their children in particular schools. The state will not be providing the county with administrative funds to support this additional responsibility.

Ms. Susan Thigpen has spoken with the Social Services Commission regarding Chairman Mike Wallace's appointment ending in June 2020. The Commission is aware that there are several appointments across the state that will end and have decided that they will be extending these appointments at this time. They are unsure how long this extension will be in place but will be sending out additional information when a decision is made and will give counties ample opportunity to obtain interest from county residents for appointment.

As a result of malware and COVID-19, the agency's budget was recently submitted with little turnaround time. Departments were advised to consider the financial strain to the county in light of COVID-19 and are extremely limited in any increases that will be considered. Salary increases and cost of living increases should not be expected for 2020-2021. Mr. Gary Ange expressed concerns about the agency having limited input into our budgetary needs and wants to ensure that the welfare of children and vulnerable adults isn't compromised as a result of budget cuts.

Motion was made, seconded and passed to adjourn the meeting until our next regular scheduled meeting on Thursday, May 28th at 8:30.


Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman


Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: May 28, 2020

