

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Special Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, December 17, 2020
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a special scheduled meeting on December 17, 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. Ila Davis, Ms. Angela Mainor, 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 added to the agenda and there were no public comments received.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Jesse Dowe and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and minutes were approved for the November 19th meeting.

Old Business

Director Thigpen contacted the Social Services Commission as requested by Mr. Jesse Dowe at the last meeting to verify the state's intentions regarding Board members whose terms were extended in 2020 as a result of COVID, to include Chairman Mike Wallace. The Commission will be meeting in March to decide when they will be appointing new individuals to replace appointees with expired terms to the Social Services Boards. Chairman Mike Wallace remains willing to serve until a new appointee is named.

New Business

Budget Report –The agency is on target with spending except for Software Maintenance. Computer security, Sentinel One, was an unexpected expense that had not been budgeted. We expect to be over budget by \$713.90 and Ms. Susan Thigpen pointed out this is significantly lower than the amount reflected on the expense report for this month due to a miscalculation. A budget amendment will be submitted to the Commissioners for approval closer to the end of the fiscal year if needed. There are no other concerns with the budget at this time. Efforts continue to finalize plans for installing windows at Social Services and this project is being handled by County Maintenance.

Income Maintenance and Child Support – Duplin County Social Services will begin our year-long REDA audit in 2021. This audit is conducted to verify that only eligible applicants are approved for Medicaid/NC Health Choice benefits 96.8% of the time and eligible applicants are not denied/withdrawn/terminated at least 96.8% of the time. Supervisors and lead workers recently participated in a webinar offered through the state on 2nd party reviews in order to strengthen supervisory oversight of eligibility determinations.

The Child Support Supervisor is in the process of reaching out to our judges to identify strengths and needs with our child support system and to explore ways to develop increased efficiency in our judicial process. Court has been cancelled for at least the next 30 days so this will create additional challenges for Child Support in ensuring that benchmarks for establishment and collections are met. There are currently 1,127 more people receiving Food and Nutrition Services in the month of November than in the month of February 2020. This increase appears to be due to the impacts of COVID on county residents. The average amount of benefits per household is \$190.00.

Personnel – Diligent efforts have continued to fill vacancies; there are currently five vacancies in Economic Benefits (EB), four vacant social worker positions, and two vacancies with Support Staff. A tentative hire has been sent over to HR for the PIA IV position. Interviews for EB vacancies were postponed earlier this week due to increasing numbers of COVID positives in Duplin County and will be rescheduled for early January. There has been a decline in turnover over the past few months but that is normal for this time of year and generally starts to increase around February of each year.

Child and Adult Services – The number of new reports has remained fairly stable for the past several months. Three of seven Assessment workers are within guidelines for caseloads and all In Home Services workers currently are within caseload guidelines. A decision has been made to rotate Child Welfare and Adult Services staff in the office on alternate weeks in response to increasing COVID cases for the month of January. Zoom and GoToMeeting formats will be utilized to maintain consistent supervisory oversight and staffing with all social workers. Social Work Supervisors have established a system that will allow for a smooth transition to remote work and increased oversight will be provided since workers struggled the last time with maintaining documentation and other paperwork in a timely manner. Ms. Angela Mainor asked whether working from home is an option for EB and Child Support staff. This is not an option due to guidance from the state and the agency's lack of ability to VPN into office computers and provide internet capacity to all staff. Although the agency is open at this time, these workers are not having significant contact with clients and the agency continues to meet with clients outside when possible or utilize the five stations set up behind the front desk.

The agency was recently monitored for Adoption Assistance and SSBG. Four of five cases were identified as SSBG errors while no errors were identified in the five adoption assistance cases that were reviewed after Director Susan Thigpen obtained additional documentation from NCDCDEE specific to fingerprint clearance letters. Supervisor Serita Southerland will be doing a 100% review of Title IV-E adoption assistance cases to verify that eligibility requirements have been met and to obtain any missing items to bring cases into compliance. A Corrective Action Plan was developed to address SSBG errors and Director Susan Thigpen will be conducting random checks to ensure that the plan is being followed. Director Susan Thigpen provided Title IV-E Eligibility training to Foster Care social workers and Family and Children's Medicaid workers earlier this month to address concerns that have been identified since this program is also monitored regularly by the state. Ms. Angela Mainor asked about data that had previously

been reported each month to the Board regarding backlog cases in supervisors' offices. There are no cases at this time that are lingering for excessive periods of time in supervisors' or workers' offices awaiting review and corrections. Program Manager Christy Jones will continue to monitor this and address if issues are identified.

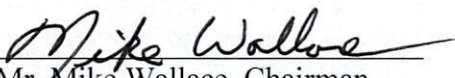
Director's Update

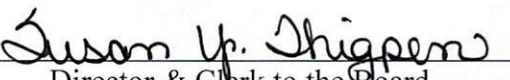
Employee Engagement Survey Updates – The majority of supervisors and management recently participated in the Assessing Belongingness and Fostering a Culture of Belonging and remaining supervisors will participate in this training in the spring. This training included valuable information that is being 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. COVID has created challenges in fostering a sense of belongingness due to social distancing. The management team coordinated a Food Truck here on Monday as a small way to thank workers for all the hard work they done in 2020 despite multiple issues such as ransomware and COVID and everyone seemed to really enjoy it. We will continue to explore ways to incorporate what we have learned into our daily practices as we enter 2021.

Non-Supportive Placements – Director Susan Thigpen provided a draft report that has been created by the Director's Association focusing on the financial and emotional burden to counties and staff with youth in care experiencing significant behavioral health issues. Between January 2019 and September 2020 227 children in the Department of Social Services Custody were placed overnight in DSS office buildings, Hotels, and DSS run group homes due to the fact that clinically appropriate placements could not be obtained. This resulted in more than 3500 hours of social worker time across the state providing caretaker supervision for these youth. Duplin County had one child for 8 nights in one of these settings at the expense of 192 hours. Duplin County Social Services generally utilizes a respite home through Oasis but this is a \$200.00 per night expense. While this is a lot of money, it is more cost efficient than pulling staff in to sit with youth and is also less liability for the agency. Agencies have reported injuries to workers, damage to property, and lower morale. This is a challenge across all LME/MCOs and will require a state level response to ensure youth receive the level of care and supervision that is needed to address their mental and behavioral health needs. Board members were encouraged to share their concerns about this practice with colleagues and members of the General Assembly to shine light on this serious problem.

Medicaid Transformation – Staff recently participated in a virtual meeting with the PHPs that will be handling managed care. There will be a short turnaround from the time sign up begins to roll out in July. The PHPs were unable to provide much information regarding the expected response from providers and enrollment for providers is just starting. There are concerns about confusion for Medicaid recipients since there will not be anyone onsite to assist with enrollment.

A motion was made by Mr. Jesse Dowe and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and passed to adjourn our meeting until the next regular scheduled meeting on January 28, 2021 at 8:30 a.m.


Mr. Mike Wallace, Chairman


Director & Clerk to the Board

The foregoing minutes were adopted on: January 28, 2021