

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES
BOARD MINUTES
Regular Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, April 22, 2021
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on April 22, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. in the Social Services Community Room located at 423 North Main St. in Kenansville, N.C. 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. Angela Mainor, Ms. Marzella Morrissey, Mr. Jesse Dowe and Ms. Ila Davis. 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 Mr. Jesse Dowe and minutes were approved for the March 25th meeting.

New Business

Mr. Jesse Dowe asked that appointment of a new Board chair be included in next month's agenda. Mr. Mike Wallace, current chair, will be rotating off the Board in June when a new member is appointed by the Social Services Commission and it has been some time since the Board selected a Chairperson.

Board Chair Mike Wallace reviewed a letter provided to the Board by County Attorney, J. Timothy Wilson, in response to Ms. Marzella Morrissey's recent request to review county Human Resource's (HR's) exit interviews with agency staff. The Board can inspect exit interview forms in the HR Director's office or HR Director Pam Brame has offered to come over and present exit interviews during closed session to the Board. Ms. Morrissey is concerned about the amount of turnover over the past few months. Board members decided to review a personnel report provided by Ms. Angie Miller as part of today's information and Ms. Morrissey expressed interest in potentially asking Ms. Brame to come to a future meeting if turnover continues to be a challenge.

Budget and Expenditures Report – This month's report was presented by Administrative Officer Dana Bonneville. There were no new items of concern with the budget and expenditures and it appears that the agency will end the fiscal year well within budget. Software did go over budget slightly but this was a direct result of the additional measures implemented in response to ransomware in early 2020. LIEAP funds were not expended for this budget year, in contrast to previous years. This was directly related to the state's decision to provide pandemic LIEAP for all individuals who received last year due to qualifying as elderly and disabled. Ms. Susan Thigpen explained that LIEAP funds are for the purpose of providing funds to assist individuals

in paying heating expenses for the winter. It is possible that the state will also be providing a supplement to recipients in the next month or so. Ms. Marzella Morrisey asked about options the agency uses in advertising financial assistance for heating and light bills and Ms. Angela Mainor pointed out that many potential recipients do not use social media. Public notices used to be provided in newspapers, flyers in churches, and other outlets that targeted vulnerable populations. The agency continues to advertise periodically in newspapers and will explore other options for providing information to the residents of Duplin County.

Chair Mike Wallace inquired about the installation of windows in the agency. The funds have been allocated for these repairs so this expenditure will not have to be approved again and will roll over into the next budget year.

Collections as a result of fraud have been significantly lower for the current budget year as a result of federal and state restrictions in terminating benefits during the state of emergency. While referrals can be made to fraud, the agency has no authority to pursue collections at this time.

Income Maintenance and Child Support – Child Support has made the statewide Outstanding Collections List of top 20 collections for three consecutive months. There has been a decrease in total collections for the past year but this can be attributed largely to the amount of time court was closed down due to COVID and changes in state guidelines that make it more difficult to collect arrears.

Although the number of children receiving subsidized childcare has decreased, the county is unable to add additional children from the waiting list due to the county's spending coefficient being over 100%. As a result of parents' fees being waived for much of the fiscal year, the expenditures have been higher than they would be normally. The state will be doing a final reallocation so there is no reason to believe at this time that Duplin County will be responsible for any expenditures related to daycare.

Food and Nutrition Services was slightly below the benchmark for March in the timeliness of regular applications. The most frequent issue with untimeliness were due to not processing the case on the 25th day with best available information and the supervisor will continue to monitor these and work with staff. The OST is also working with the county in identifying issues and developing strategies to bring FNS measures within the benchmarks.

Personnel – This month's report was presented by Administrative Assistant Angie Miller. There have been 13 resignations in 2021 and six (6) of those were in April. There are currently 21 vacancies but six of those positions are in the process of being filled in the next few weeks pending HR approval. The Board is in agreement that internal applicants should be notified in writing whenever they are not selected for a position in order to expedite the hiring process. Ms. Angie Miller is getting our continuous postings periodically reposted on social media in order to increase applications and the response from this has been positive to date. Ms. Susan Thigpen discussed the effects that have been seen with Family and Children's Medicaid staff leaving – a few workers leave and then those that are left quickly burn out and start looking for other jobs as caseload sizes increase due to vacancies. Even though the agency will have six new workers

starting soon in those units, getting these new workers trained is challenging due to the shortage of lead workers. The agency has reached out to previous workers about the possibility of coming back as temporary part-time employees to minimize the impact from recent turnover.

Social Work Programs – This month’s report was presented by Program Manager Christy Jones. There was a decrease in reports for the month that allowed social workers an opportunity to reduce caseload sizes. The severity of cases continues to increase and are more time consuming now than in previous years. Teddy Bear is hoping to open an office in the Mount Olive area to conduct CMEs as early as July and Board members were encouraged to recommend any locations in that area that would be conducive for this. Teddy Bear also hopes to contract with area mental health providers to meet needs.

Director’s Update

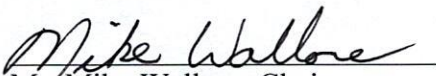
Ms. Susan Thigpen shared data from the 2021 NC Data Card for Duplin and neighboring counties. Data is from 2019 and provides a snapshot of counties’ statistics specific to a strong start for babies, economic security, nurturing homes and communities, high quality education, and health and wellness. Two notable concerns when compared to other counties is that 9.6% of children in Duplin County are without health insurance and the number of children living in poor or low income homes is slightly higher than in neighboring counties. The number of children being assessed for abuse and neglect in Duplin County per 1,000 was consistent with neighboring counties. A review of additional data indicates that the county has had a significant decrease in the number of verified abuse and neglect incidents in recent years; with 499 incidents in SFY 2015 and only 357 in SFY 2019 and 378 in SFY 2020.

The agency recently had to go back through all of the FNS cases in which recipients were determined eligible due to instructions from the state not to include P-Unemployment benefits and then advising counties that these instructions had been incorrect. Cases for 41 recipients were potentially impacted and eligibility had to be redetermined resulting in one case in Duplin County being approved in error, meaning the individual will be responsible for paying back more than \$5,000.00 in benefits. Due to the inability to cancel benefits at this time, the recipients will continue to receive benefits at this time although they will eventually have to pay them all back. We are reaching out to the recipients to let them know what has happened and to encourage them to leave the additional benefits on their card since that can be applied to the payback.

The first month of the REDA audit is finishing up at this time. This audit is time consuming and requires frequent communication with the auditors to address questions and respond to case findings. The process for supervisors QA’g cases that have been pulled is being modified to allow for more timely responses to questions. Based on recent interviews with staff remaining and those leaving, the REDA audit has created additional stress and anxiety that is impacting the morale of employees. The agency is exploring ways to support staff and minimize the impacts of the audit throughout the year. Ms. Angela Mainor also suggested the possibility of utilizing

Dr. Wesley Boykin to do some diversity training and leadership training with Social Services staff. She has already spoken with Ms. Pam Brame, Duplin County Human Resources Director about this possibility.

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 May 27, 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: May 27 2021