

DUPLIN COUNTY BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
BOARD MINUTES  
Regular Scheduled Meeting  
Thursday, May 27, 2021  
8:30 AM

The Duplin County Board of Social Services met in a regular scheduled meeting on May 27, 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, 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 Mr. Jesse Dowe and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor and minutes were approved for the April 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

**New Business**

A motion was made by Mr. Mike Wallace and seconded by Ms. Angela Mainor to appoint Mr. Jesse Dowe as Chairman of the Social Services Board effective with July's meeting and the motion was approved. The Board discussed the possibility of appointing a Vice-Chair but agreed that one was not needed at this time. Mr. Mike Wallace will be exiting the Board with the appointment of a new member by the Social Services Commission.

**Budget and Expenditures Report** – There was no items of concern with this month's Budget and Expenditures Report. Ms. Susan Thigpen indicated that the allocation for repairing the agency's windows will be moved to the next budget year and that this project should be completed by the end of the year. There were a couple of line items that required budget amendments but the agency was able to move unexpended funds from other line items to cover these expenses. The Board discussed the large amount of projected unexpended county dollars for the SFY 2020-2021. Many items such as travel costs and attorney's fees were much lower than expected as a result of COVID. The proposed budget for 2021-2022 does not have significant changes from the current year and was not impacted by the unexpended line items in this year. The agency is moving forward with planning for iiReception that will provide the agency with web based logs for all Economic Benefits programs, provide easy tracking of who is in the building in the event of an emergency, allow social workers to complete field agendas, and identify potential issues with wait times in the lobby.

**Income Maintenance and Child Support** – The NC DHHS notified counties yesterday that they would not be requiring formal Corrective Action Plans as long as there is a state of emergency. Duplin County has had three consecutive months of not meeting the benchmark for

timeliness of regular FNS applications. Although a plan is not required, the agency will be continuing to work with our state consultant on strategies to address the primary issues that have been identified as contributing to the delays in processing applications. The agency is meeting or exceeding all other benchmarks at this time, particularly noteworthy with the amount of turnover and inexperienced staff in recent months.

**Personnel** – There are currently 19 vacancies in the agency with five resignations in May and four have already been received with final dates of employment in June. The agency has brought in seven new employees during the May as well as two temporary part-time employees with prior experience in the agency with Family and Children’s Medicaid. There have been delays in getting potential hires processed through county HR, which has contributed to continuing vacancies. The number of vacancies throughout the agency has taken its toll on employees and management but everyone has stepped up and demonstrated a spirit of teamwork and commitment to the work we do to ensure that the needs of Duplin County residents continue to be met while also meeting the stringent demands from the current Medicaid audit throughout 2021. Board members are optimistic that the upcoming salary study will assist Duplin County in offering competitive salaries to address ongoing turnover. There was also discussion regarding the possibility of allowing employees to work virtually as an incentive since many counties are moving to that since COVID. Board members were also supportive of the agency receiving permission from the county manager to pay employees for overtime rather than offering comp time since that may serve as a better incentive and the number of vacancies makes it challenging to allow workers to take off comp time. The agency continues to explore other ways to motivate staff to include an ice cream social on the following day and team building activities at both the unit and agency levels. Eastpointe will be conducting a virtual training with staff in late June on The Connection between Personal Resiliency and the Workplace.

**Social Work Programs** – The number of Assessments and In Home Services cases has increased in the past month and this has been influenced by an increase of screened in reports in February and March. The number of Assessments remaining open beyond 45 has increased as well with approximately half of those being attributed to CME/CFEs. In Home Services caseloads are currently within standards.

As a result of a number of resignations in child welfare, the program manager and supervisors met with the social workers to develop a strategy for managing increased workloads. The decision was made to continue with the assigned on-call worker who will now also manage a small caseload and the Permanency Planning Unit will be handling all intake. In Home Services workers will also be assigned a small number of less complicated Assessments since the vacancies are in Assessments. This plan will be monitored closely and adjusted as needed.

### **Director’s Update**

The enrollment period for Managed Care was extended a week and Duplin County ended up with just under 10% of recipients enrolling. The state has started the auto enrollment process and has indicated that 97% of all recipients will be assigned to their current provider. In Duplin County, 12,303 current recipients will be moving to managed care and approximately 5,000 will

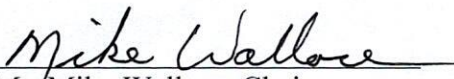
remain on fee for service. The agency will be monitoring workloads for the NEMT department to adjust job responsibilities as needed.

Counties will be responsible for the administration of the Low Income Housing Water Assistance Program, a new program that will be Federally funded until September 2023. It will be modeled after LIEAP but will likely use CIP guidelines. The state is waiting for additional guidance from the Federal government and expects to be able to roll out in September. Having adequate staff to provide these services will be the primary challenge for Duplin County since this is an entirely new program and participation in this program is expected to be fairly high. The state has also indicated that counties will have only a month from the establishments of clear guidelines to implementation.

The agency will be opening fully on June 1<sup>st</sup> and masks are no longer required although strongly encouraged for anyone who has not been vaccinated. CPS and APS are expected to wear masks inside of homes and facilities. Partitions will be available on each floor for workers that prefer using them whenever they are meeting with clients. Hurricane sheltering procedures can largely return to normal as per American Red Cross guidelines although Duplin County will have an isolation area at each shelter to accommodate individuals with a COVID diagnosis or symptoms. Board members also discussed concerns about general safety for employees as the agency reopens to the public. The agency does have the flexibility to adjust security presence as needed

P-EBT benefits will be provided to all school age children in the amount of \$375.00 in a one-time payment issued in July or August. There has been no decision made yet regarding benefits for the 2021-2022 school year.

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 June 24, 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: June 24 2021