

Baltimore County Department of Social Services Board Minutes

The meeting of the Advisory Board of the Baltimore County Department of Social Services (DSS) was held October 17, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. via WebEx.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Stefanie Bronson, Timothy Butka, Lisa Simon Jablon, Dr. Jasmine Leigh Morse, Elder Joseph Saunders and Dr. Roslyn Wiley

MEMBERS ABSENT: Dr. Donald Gabriel and Tom Hennessey

OTHERS PRESENT: Mark Millspaugh; Deputy Director, and Kathy Wynn, Executive Secretary to the Director.

I. Reading and Approval of the Minutes:

Motion: To approve the minutes of May 16, June 13, July 18 and September 22

May 16 minutes approved with the following correction:

VI. Adjournment – Motion corrected to read, “to adjourn the meeting”

June 13 - Minutes approved as presented

July 18 minutes approved with the following correction:

Members Present: Dr. Bronson’s name corrected to read” Dr. Stefanie Bronson”

September 22 – Minutes approved as presented

II. DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Mr. Millspaugh reviewed with board members total SNAP participant data. Prior to COVID, 600,000 individuals were receiving SNAP benefits in Maryland. In 2020 for the two month period of March and April, cases increased by an estimated 200,000. More SNAP caseloads were added in these two months than during the entire Great Recession (2007/2008). This data shows the safety net system was responsive to people in their time of need during a once-in-a-generation public health emergency and affiliated economic downturn.

We are now back to where we were pre-pandemic. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) eliminated many of the waivers that were in effect during COVID. In February of this year, all cases added during over the past two years that did not have to submit a redetermination during that entire time were once again required to begin recertifying. An overwhelming number of redeterminations then became due in the month. Individuals added during this period were unaware of the redetermination process and directed to the State’s call center to phone for information. Call center operators create tickets in the CRM system that go to local DSS offices for response for additional information to assist the caller. Due to the volume of calls, individuals were having a difficult time reaching a call center operator. They were trying all avenues, e.g.; phoning other offices, writing to elected officials, emails and in person visits to the district offices to find out why their benefits ended.

Through a contract enhancement approved by the Board of Public Works, an additional one hundred operators were added to the call center. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is also looking at new scheduling software to add to the current case management system to simplify the process.

Family Investment Administration (FIA) Appreciation Month

October is FIA appreciation month. Activities to recognize FIA staff internally for their efforts are planned.

Child Welfare

The State continues to struggle with not having sufficient programs under contract to place youth who are not appropriate for a family setting. Facilities/programs are extremely limited. We continue to be highly challenged with mostly older youth. We were notified last week that two more treatment facilities are closing their doors. Workers who have these youth in their caseloads are submitting their resignations. This continues to be a challenge. As of today, there are 18 vacancies in child welfare more than double what is has been.

Youth are being approved to move out of state if the program meets their needs. The State has acknowledged we have a placement crisis, and is working to address the issues.

Good news received today in a meeting with Secretary Padilla, local directors with the Governor's office and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary. A new salary plan has been established for many of our employees to include child welfare social workers and FIA specialists. This plan becomes effective November 15. New hires will start at an elevated Step 9. If not already at that level, current employees will be escalated to that step. This will affect an estimated 80 employees. We recently learned the Governor approved a COLA of 4.5% for all state employees on top of the \$1500.00 bonus they received. This plan is being marketed to retain current staff and recruit new staff.

Budget Updates

- We are four months into the fiscal year and flex funds for the year are almost spent. Youth who are waiting for placement are being placed in hotels. We must also pay additional staff to stay with the youth 24/7. Funds to pay for the hotel and additional staff come out of flex funds allocated from the State to local DSS offices. Flex funds are projected to run out of in November. We are cutting back in a number of areas we normally would support. Flex funds are also used for our foster youth summer camp.
- The federal government has informed the State they will receive \$93K this year for the SNAP Employment and Training program at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). Last year the federal government allocated \$200K.
- The Office of Housing and Community Development (HCD) informed Mr. Millsbaugh they have funds to operate the Freezing Weather Shelter (FWS) as operated the past two years. The shelter is to be ready to open if needed beginning November 15.
- HCD will providing additional funds to assist with eviction prevention. Payment amounts to eligible households will be scaled back as HCD is unable to pay a full years' worth of rent for individuals.

III. OLD BUSINESS

None.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Millspaugh asked board members to please spread the word the department is in need of foster parents. There is a dedicated phone number individuals can phone for additional information. Mr. Millspaugh will send materials for board members to place on their Facebook page.

Mr. Millspaugh informed the board he spoke with Mr. Hennessey who informed him that he would be unable to serve on the board soon as he will no longer be a county resident. Upon vacating the Board, his position as vice-chair will need to be filled.

Mr. Millspaugh reported that Mr. Moses attended the MASSB meeting. Mr. Millspaugh will provide an update at the next meeting.

V. REMARKS OF THE CHAIRPERSON

For board members who have not done so, please complete the ethics training. An email, to include a link to the training, will be forwarded.

The next virtual meeting of the Board is scheduled for November 21.

VI. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 5:52PM
Motion by: Timothy Butka
Second by: Dr. Stefanie Bronson
Decision: Unanimous Approval



Mark Millspaugh