

Durham County Board of Social Services

Regular Session Minutes

February 17, 2021

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. The DSS Board Meeting was virtual due to COVID-19.

The following DSS Board members were in attendance:

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs, Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman
Board members: Janice P. Paul, Jacqueline Beatty-Smith, and Charles I. Mitchell.

The DCDSS Department was represented by the following:

Director William Rose, Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy, Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman, Assistant Directors: Krystal Harris, Jovetta Whitfield, Rhonda Stevens and Janeen Gordon. DSS staff attending included Latoya Chambers, Meghan Russ, Kalindra Ellerbe, Lee Little, Quannah Jackson-Brown, Sharyn Flood, Quanesha Archer, Pamela Purifoy, Elizabeth Granby, John Kenion, Shontelle Smith, Darlene Whitfield, and Loretta Roberts.

James Hart from Durham County Human Resources attended the meeting.

Danielle Briggs, Senior Assistant County Attorney was present.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the February 17, 2021 regular meeting to order.

Public Comments

No public comments

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the agenda. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith amended her motion and moved to approve the agenda as written and Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman seconded.

The agenda was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Janice P. Paul	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the regular meeting on January 20, 2021, were approved by the DSS Board. Board member Janice P. Paul offered a motion to approve the minutes and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The minutes were unanimously approved by voice vote.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Janice P. Paul	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		

Chair Report

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs will be attending the Board of County Commissioners retreat next week. She mentioned the good news that Director William Rose shared about Judge Evans agreeing to an eviction moratorium through May 1, 2021. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs commended Director William Rose, Assistant Director Janeen Gordon and all the staff that encouraged Judge Evans' decision.

Director Report

Director William Rose submitted a written report.

Director William Rose informed the board members of a recent audit with the County Audit Department conducted by Darlana Moore. The audit was based on some previous corrective actions in the Foster Care and Adoption Assistance eligibility process. The department will be presenting to the oversight committee in March stressing the need to build our internal Quality Control processes within the Quality Assurance and Training division.

The Early Childhood Action Planning committee had a meeting today and started developing the twelve goals for the Durham County plan. The goals will be submitted to the Board of County Commissioners in June or July. Director William Rose stated that this is a big community collaborative effort and Durham is the only county developing a county-specific Early Childhood Action Plan.

Next month the PHP's will be presenting their companies to the board and will have a Q&A session to learn more about what is coming soon with Medicaid Transformation. There will be a community outreach effort in the next three to four weeks.

A facility meeting has been scheduled regularly for every two weeks with County Engineering and General Services regarding the construction of the parking garage and temporarily moving staff parking to another location. The departments are currently planning the coordination to relay the information to staff. Remote work will increase during the first six months of the garage construction to avoid staff from having to park and ride the bus to the office to keep staff safe following the CDC guidelines. The transition will start in April or early May.

Director William Rose informed the board of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) call in anticipation of bad weather tomorrow. The congregate shelters will not be opened in the event of massive power outages and will instead utilize warming centers. Hotels will be contracted to keep people safe using the CDC guidelines. The board will be updated on any reduction in operations at the agency.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired if Darlana Moore made any recommendations about a certain number of positions for Quality Assurance and Training. Director William Rose answered that Darlana is suggesting that the department decides on building the capacity. The department is currently reviewing the following: (a) staffing ratios (b) number of cases (c) number of employees. The department plans to have the information before the budget presentation or possibly for the March meeting.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)

Director William Rose provided an ERAP update handout with the basic guidelines. ERAP provides \$25B with Durham County receiving \$1.2M and the City of Durham obtaining \$8.4M. The department is working diligently with the City of Durham and awaiting formal guidance from the program.

The department has conversations with North Carolina Association of Mayors and North Carolina Association of County Commissioners every two weeks. The program is income-based at 80% Area Median Income (AMI) there is a priority target for 50% AMI or less initially. The program determines eligibility by looking at housing instability and how the applicant was impacted by COVID-19. Director William Rose thanked Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs for her part in Judge Evans making this decision to prevent these evictions. ERAP focuses on the arrears first and will pay up to three months of future rent. After three months, the applicant will need to recertify by verifying their income and housing need. The landlord can apply on behalf of the tenant with the tenant's permission and the payments will go to the landlord. This program can pay the applicant directly if the landlord will not take the payment. Director William Rose praised Assistant Director Janeen Gordon for establishing relationships with the landlords. The relationship with the city has been strengthened through this process. The goal is to have three nonprofits in this program to help improve access especially in the communities that are hard to reach and where disparities are common. The nonprofits will submit their applications to DSS.

On February 22nd, the BOCC will authorize the county funds and approve the interlocal agreement for the city funds. The goal is to have this program functioning by March 15th or shortly afterward. The software being developed will automatically create an online application. The department and County IS&T are partnering on this effort and will be making decisions this week. Director William Rose commended Janeen Gordon, Lee Little, Contessa Sawyer, Sherry Rogers, Kelly Inman, Kalindra Ellerbe and all the staff working on this since early January.

Program Manager Lee Little commented that this is the third time implementing the rental assistance program throughout the pandemic. The department is continuously making improvements to ensure clients receive the needed assistance as quickly as possible with excellent customer service. The collaboration with the city, landlords and the judicial branch is an extra benefit moving forward. Program Manager Lee Little gave accolades to Assistant Director Krystal Harris' Call Center division for taking on an increased amount of phone calls that the social workers are unable to answer due to processing applications.

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon added that the internal collaboration to have the computer tool up and running is miraculous. She is anticipating this program to continue and has received several calls about the next several phases of money coming. The highest priority is 50% AMI or less, long-term unemployment and applicants that have never received public COVID-19 relief assistance before.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs commended the department for their hard work and acknowledged the user-friendly software for the community. Board member Janice P. Paul inquired if there will be cross-matching capabilities to access the Division of Employment Security (DES) system and obtain income verification from other agencies. Director William Rose answered that the state systems will be utilized. Assistant Director Janeen Gordon added that the program is working on a data agreement with the state. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith inquired about the specifics in determining which nonprofits have been used before and the criteria used when selecting them to assist with the applications. Director William Rose answered that it is a joint effort and the city is leading this part. The nonprofits chosen will have previously served populations that had historical disparities. Assistant Director Janeen Gordon added that the goal is to identify nonprofits in the community to assist individuals with language barriers. Also, individuals who have expressed a known distrust with the government because of their documentation status. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs wanted clarification on if the applicant had to be a U.S. citizen to apply for ERAP. Director William Rose stated that you do not have to be a U.S. citizen to receive assistance. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about how the housing need memo would be shared. Director William Rose stated it will be shared with the partners and used in the budget folder. General Manager Joanne Pierce has a copy and Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs can also inform the BOCC.

Vacancy Report

Human Resources Analyst James Hart provided a report.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the 12.56% vacancy rate. James Hart stated that the 68 vacancies included the frozen and Phase II positions. The divisions with high turnover are Child and Family Services and Family Economic Independence. James Hart is researching patterns to get ahead of additional turnovers. FEI has internal staff moving in terms of promotions and newly created positions; also, the provisional staff has been transferred to permanent positions. Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy suggested that supporting staff emotionally in this virtual environment may retain some staff longer. James Hart informed the board that the Strategic

Initiative Manager Michael Davis will be providing a virtual self-care series soon for staff. Director William Rose added that DSS is a diligent partner with County HR and when notified of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) request or an employee with underlying health conditions has willingly assisted with placement within the department. Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman inquired about the applicants relocating to different counties and if money is a factor. James Hart answered that the age demographic of 24-39 is trying to determine the holistic value of what an organization can offer (pay, benefits, positions for advancement, culture, technology, etc.).

Family Economic Independence (FEI) – Rhonda Stevens, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens submitted a written report.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs noted that 269 people were served by Work First in January. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens stated that this is the monthly average for recertifications. She reported that three people gained employment during the January time frame. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired if Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens is aware of the county funding the Step-Up Ministry with \$75,000. This program connects people to the Back to Work Initiative with Durham Technical Community College and offers short certification programs. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens is familiar with and has served on the committee. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs commended the department for its hard work. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens informed the board that the Accuracy Improvement Plan (AIP) was submitted to the state Medicaid staff by the February 11th deadline.

Customer Accountability and Talent Development – Krystal Harris, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Krystal Harris submitted a written report.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the vacancies. Assistant Director Krystal Harris answered that the approved positions were posted yesterday and aiming to have them filled immediately. She is currently waiting on two Quality Assurance and Training (QAT) positions in Phase II to be approved and assigned position numbers to proceed with posting. The department has filled all the vacancies that have been approved with the exemption. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked her and the team for their hard work.

Director William Rose added that some of the Leadership Team and the Call Center will be piloting the Jabber technology to build more remote capacity. Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman inquired about the challenge of having one trainer for two of the programs. Child Care only had one social worker to do Quality Control and Training. The position was vacated at the end of last year. The backup staff member is QAT for Child Welfare and is unavailable due to preparing for federal audits and establishing the onboarding academy. Aging and Adult Services has one QAT staff member as well and the backup is also a Child Welfare QAT. Assistant Director Krystal Harris agreed with Director William Rose regarding rebuilding the capacity starting with Child Welfare and including Aging and Adult Services. Board member Janice P. Paul inquired if the connectivity issues were resolved. Assistant Director Krystal Harris stated that it has somewhat improved depending on the number of people within the county using the VPN. The Jabber software does not require the VPN, but the call center will need it to access the Cisco system. Assistant Director Krystal Harris shared this concern with County IS&T regarding expanding the capacity of the VPN since the department is moving toward more remote work. Director William Rose stated that IS&T is upgrading the F5 software. Program Manager Kalindra Ellerbe reported that IS&T increased the license to 1,000 users and is in the process of revamping the VPN software. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked if the Public Health call center is dependent on the same system. She received some complaints about calls not being answered relating to vaccine information. Assistant Director Krystal Harris stated that Public Health has turned off the ability to leave voice messages and has a smaller call center than DSS.

Child and Family Services – Jovetta Whitfield, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith inquired about the Child Welfare social workers that are choosing not to have the COVID-19 vaccine and if they will be encouraged to be vaccinated for the well-being of their clients. Director William Rose stated that we are unable to mandate the vaccine and have collaborated with the Public Health Director Rodney Jenkins to dispel some of the concerns. The initial response was low, but the interest increased when it became available. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield stated that twenty-seven or more Child Welfare social workers have been vaccinated. The department has taken precautions by providing plenty of PPE and making upgrades to the county cars. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield stated that the N-95 masks and hazmat suits are reserved for Covid-19 exposed families.

The family visitations will resume on March 1st. Board member Janice P. Paul asked if the department could decline to transport a client who refuses to wear a mask. Director William Rose replied if the client is an adult it could be handled differently but will transport a foster child. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs suggested checking the guidelines about double masking and encourage it to staff. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs also inquired about the guidelines regarding ventilation in the cars. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield responded that there has not been a discussion since the installation of the plexiglass. The staff may need some guidance in transporting in their personal cars. Human Resources will be sending out guidance shortly. Program Manager Quanesha Archer shared the new Binti software being utilized in the licensing division. The goal is to streamline the licensing process for the resource parents to access and complete their forms electronically. The initial inquiry process has the capability of being completed via the dashboard. The assigned licensing worker will receive and view the forms on the system. The placement module will assist with cross-matching and securing appropriate placements based on the resource parents. The software will allow cross-matching of private agencies for placement purposes. The staff will be training on the licensing component on March 4th. The placement component training is scheduled for March 24th. The inquiries and the resource parents will have access to the system upon the completion of the internal trainings. Program Manager Quanesha Archer reported that there were a couple of meetings regarding Regional Abuse and Medical Specialists (RAMS) with the NC Child Medical Evaluation Program (CMEP) through UNC Health Care. The overall goal is to aid in reducing fatalities and repeat maltreatments around the investigative assessment and CMEP process to ensure consistency around referring children for child medical examinations. The Specialized Foster Care Plan for Medicaid had a webinar last week which will launch in July 2022. A Foster Care Manager is currently being recruited and will be collocated in DSS.

Aging and Adult Services – Lee Little, Program Manager

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon submitted a written report.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the number of people that come through the coordinated entry for homelessness and the quantity served. She also wanted insight into what happens to the people that are not referred to services. Program Manager Lee Little answered during an Entry Point intake assessment relatives and friends are contacted along with providing referrals. The client may receive a stipend for food if a family member or friend allows them to stay until housing or a shelter placement becomes available. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs was concerned about the citizens that are not

provided with a placement. Program Manager Lee Little stated that the department administers extensive case management for every individual situation. There is also some availability in the COVID-19 hotel for placement if needed. Program Manager Lee Little highlighted that the APS guardianships have increased throughout the pandemic. The department is currently working with agencies in assisted living homes to find a placement. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about APS social workers entering the long-term care facilities. Program Manager Lee Little replied that 65% of the APS social workers going into the homes and assisted living centers have been vaccinated. He also informed the board that the department is taking referrals received through NCCARE360. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs applauded the team for their outstanding work.

Business Operations – Kelly Inman, Chief Operations Officer

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman submitted a written report.

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman shared a PowerPoint presentation on the budget request for the fiscal year 2021-2022. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the goal relating to the childcare coefficient being at 93.82%. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman responded that it is 100%. Director William Rose added that on the latest state report the coefficient is at 95.3%. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens added that the department has been working on the waiting list since November. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman made the following highlights: (1) expenditure budget is \$56M (2) budget revenue is \$29M (3) budget county dollars is \$26M (4) no optional services were cut. The Budget office asked for Phase III to be reentered as a priority for the budget year 2022. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired if the budget request included all the frozen positions. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman replied that all positions are funded and budgeted. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith asked will the QAT positions be considered in the fiscal year 2022. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman answered that the QAT positions may be reallocated within Phase III depending on the county budget negotiations. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested that the PowerPoint presentation be sent to the board members.

Unfinished Business

COVID-19 Updates – previously covered in the meeting

IT Update

Director William Rose had a meeting with County IS&T and the board members will need to work within the scope of the iPads for security reasons instead of receiving agency cell phones. He will relay more information to the board members next month. Vice-Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman asked about the security issue with using personal cell phones. Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy explained that the use of personal cell phones for authentication purposes will not be subject to the public record request. Program Manager Kalindra Ellerbe added that you will be required to use the multi-factor authenticator on your personal cell phone to utilize the iPad. Personal cell phones can be used to access county email through Office 365, but you will need to authenticate.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs commended Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy for her amazing job emceeding the virtual 16th Annual Durham City-County Martin Luther King, Jr. Employee Observance program.

Board Action Items

No additions

Adjournment

Board member Janice P. Paul adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted

Chairperson _____
Date

Secretary to the Board _____
Date