

**SOCIAL SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**March 28, 2022**  
**4:00 p.m.**

**The Social Services Advisory Board held its March Board Meeting on March 28, 2022 at 4:00 p.m. in person and via Zoom.**

**Members attending** – Mary Accor, Deb Hardin, Denise Wright, Danny Blanton, Lendra Phillips, Betsy Wells, Allison Gragg

**Others attending** – Katie Swanson, Destiny Davidson, Sherry Vess, Ali Wilson, Angela Woods, Misti Merritt, Annette Pendergraft, Andrea Power

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mary Accor, Chair, called the meeting to order and Lendra Phillips led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

**AGENDA ADOPTION**

**ACTION:** Lendra Phillips made the motion, seconded by Danny Blanton, and unanimously approved by the Advisory Board to, *approve the proposed agenda.*

**CITIZEN RECOGNITION**

None registered to speak.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

**A. Minutes**

The Clerk to the Board emailed the Minutes from the February 28, 2022 regular meeting to Advisory Board members prior to today's meeting.

**B. Personnel Report**

The Clerk to the Board emailed the personnel report to Advisory Board members prior to today's meeting.

**C. Executive Summary**

The Clerk to the Board emailed the Executive Summary for February 2022 to Advisory Board members prior to today's meeting.

## **CONSENT AGENDA ADOPTION**

**ACTION:** Lendra Phillips made a motion, seconded by Denise Wright, vote passed unanimously by the Board to, ***approve the proposed agenda***

## **REGULAR AGENDA**

A. **Data, Economic Services, Ali Wilson, Program Administrator, Economic Services/Child Support**

Ms. Wilson explained some of the processes of Economic Services and how Covid restrictions being lifted are impacting these services. For the past two years, many clients receiving services were placed under waivers due to the pandemic.

Food stamps for the last two years have been under a recertification waiver. Staff did not have to complete recertifications for FNS recipients or food nutrition services in January 2022. The waivers were revised since then. Previously, any six-month recertification would be waived for an additional six months. Now, only the first recertification can be waived.

DSS is still under a waiver for the Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents program. This means that someone who is able bodied and does not have dependents would only be eligible for three months out of a three-year period.

Still under waivers are services for H & I Drug felons, which means those individuals would have to go through an assessment before they could be eligible to receive food stamps.

On the Medicaid side, the biggest waivers right now are the limited terminations. There are only three reasons that we can terminate someone from the Medicaid program: moved out of state, deceased or client asks to have his/her case closed.

We also are not able to reduce benefits for the most part. If a client reports a change that would put them in a lower class of Medicaid, in many cases, we're not allowed to react to those changes.

We are still under a waiver for our recertifications in Medicaid. Ms. Wilson explained that her team decided to continue to work recertifications because they had the option to do so. While this is a proactive move, they still have significant increase in the recipients in both programs, due to waivers.

In a comparison from March 2020 through 2021, the average recipient count was 22,000. March 21 through February 2022, saw an increase to 25,000 recipients. This reflects 40% increase in FNS recipients over the last two years due to the pandemic.

On the Medicaid side, in 2020-2021, there were approximately 31,000 Medicaid recipients in Cleveland County. Now there are 35,000. This represents a 20% increase in Medicaid recipients.

Over the last several years policy changes that lead to Medicaid expansion have occurred. The most recent example is that they have extended the postpartum period for the MPW or Medicaid for Pregnant Women from 60 days to 12 months. It covers the birth of the baby and all the

related services.

Currently we have several IMC vacancies right now. In order to fill those vacancies quickly, due to the increasing caseloads on our caseworkers, we will participate in a one day hiring event or job fair. It will be March 29 at the Cleveland County Memorial Library from 10am to 2pm. Our hope is that we can bring people in who might be interested in working for Cleveland County. We'll have representatives from HR there to talk a bit to talk to them about all the benefits that are provided to employees who work with Cleveland County. HR will also do on the spot qualifications to ensure that someone meets the minimum qualifications for whichever job they're interested in. If they meet the minimum qualifications, and they're interested in applying for a job, then they can go ahead and fill out a shortened version of our application. After that, we will immediately take them for an on-the-spot interview. The hope is that we can make job offers to these individuals on same day or the next day.

Ms. Wilson stated that she believes the job fair will be very beneficial to us. We will have an opportunity to talk to candidates and get an idea of why they're interested in the position.

**B. Child Abuse Prevention Month, Destiny Davidson, Deputy Director**

Deputy Director Destiny Davidson spoke to the Board about Child Abuse Prevention Month, which will be in April. She discussed advocacy and the way we support Child Abuse Prevention Awareness. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, we will wear blue in recognition and support of Child Abuse Prevention. Ms. Davidson encouraged the Board to come to DSS at 2 PM on April 1, 2022 for a group photo, or to send photos of themselves wearing blue to Annette Pendergraft to post on DSS WorkPlace.

On the last Friday of the month, April 29, the county will have a "Sound the Alarm" event. Various county departments will be gathering at Cleveland County DSS and Cleveland County Administration, wearing blue and sounding sirens, bells, whistles and horns in unison at 2:15 PM to show support of all the people in our community who work to prevent child abuse. Refreshments will be served.

Some of the different initiatives that we are involved in is working with the Health Department regarding car seat safety for children in the community. Another one is regarding safe sleep. We have some unfortunate sleep fatalities over the past couple of years. DSS wants to work with our community partners and our community to ensure that everyone is following the ABCs of Safe Sleep. They have also helped provide resources to people in the community so that they are able to access what is needed to ensure that their infants have safe sleep.

Another thing being done in our Child Welfare department is work to assess safety and risk throughout the life of the cases of the families we're working with from the time we walk in the door to the time we close a case.

Ms. Davidson closed by reminding the Board about foster parent recruitment. On May 14th at the Strawberry Festival DSS will have a booth where they will try to recruit appropriate foster parents.

### **C. Employee Appreciation, Katie Swanson, Director**

Director Swanson also invited the Board to DSS Appreciation Day on April 11, 2022 from 12-2 PM at Hanna Park in Shelby. This will be a good event with food and games for our staff.

Director Swanson also introduced to the Board, our new Assistant to the Social Services and Health Department Directors, Andrea Power. This will be a shared assistant position. Ms. Power comes to us with a strong background in DJJ administration, and we look forward to her assistance and her career growth as DSS and HD merge into one building. Ms. Power will also become the Clerk to the Health Department Advisory Board and the DSS Advisory Board. We are all happy and excited to have her on our teams.

### **BOARD REPORTS**

#### **A. CHILD PROTECTION/FATALITY TEAM**

Ms. Phillips did not attend the last meeting, but reported that there was only one open case which DSS is already working with. The primary reason for that meeting was to see if there any other resources or any help to better serve the family in this case.

#### **B. NCACBSS**

Ms. Wells discussed the upcoming NCACBSS in person meeting in Raleigh on April 8. Members received a flyer, designed by Ms. Accor, about this event. At 8:30 AM, the event will start with registration and refreshments. The meeting itself starts at 10 AM, but may be moved earlier to 9:30 AM.

They will have the School Governor Representative who did their workshop in November come to talk about the legalities of being a board member. There will also be people from the Department of Health and Human Services. An invitation was sent to our new Secretary, but he will be away that weekend, so they are hoping to have the Deputy Secretary attend.

They also discussed things that relate to just the board members such as working together as a board, the role of the DSS board chair, working DSS board members who then work with elected officials.

Ms. Wells reported that they will have the August Social Services Institute in Hickory. Ms. Wells extended an invitation to board members to attend. Reduced hotel rates were secured, but there are also other hotels near the venue. They are expecting over 100 people there from across the state and hopefully others besides Ms. Wells and Ms. Accor can attend and represent Cleveland County.

Ms. Wells added that the Institute is for regular board members, actual members, advisory board members and consolidated boards. It will be a varied and inclusive event representing counties which have consolidating boards within NCACBSS. The agenda is being worked on and will be completed soon.

The event will last until 3 PM and there will be door prizes, refreshments and lunch. A speaker from the Department of Health and Human Services will be there to talk and hopefully

attendees will learn what's going on in legislature and any budget changes. Sharnese Ransome will also be a part of the agenda.

Ms. Wells expressed that this is an event which will endeavor to return to in-person meetings, and she is looking forward to seeing people get together, again.

**C. COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Hardin spoke of the county-wide 2022 Employee Recognition event. This took place at LeGrand Center for staff who won nominations or who were recognized for years of service. A luncheon was served and awards were given out. The theme was “We are so Fortunate to Have Team Members Like You”, and each person received a fortune cookie with his/her food. The “fortunes” read one of the Cleveland County values.

Commissioner Hardin also brought two new county staff members to the attention of the Board. Joining as our new Marketing & Communications Director is Aron Goss. He is making sure our county’s presence and social media news stays updated and keeps the public informed.

The second new county staff member is Dr. Eric Davis, who will be serving as Employee Support Management. Dr. Davis will focus on departments with high stress, and will meet with all staff members in the county. He has already made his introductions to staff at DSS.

Both Mr. Goss and Dr. Davis will be wonderful assets to our county employees as they assist with employee well-being and up to date information to keep our staff emotionally well and to keep our community informed.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business to come before the DSS Advisory Board at this time, Danny Blanton made a motion, seconded by Lendra Phillips, and unanimously adopted by the Board, to adjourn the meeting. The next regular meeting of the DSS Advisory Board is scheduled for **April 25, 2022.**

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Mary Accor, Chairperson  
Cleveland County Social Services Advisory Board

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Annette Pendergraft, Clerk to the Board  
Cleveland County Social Services Advisory Board Clerk