

## **Durham County Board of Social Services**

### **Regular Monthly Meeting**

**March 15, 2023**

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, March 15, 2023. The DSS Board meeting will continue to be virtual until further notice.

The following DSS Board members were in attendance: Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs Board members: Janice P. Paul, Jacqueline Beatty-Smith, and Charles I. Mitchell.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman requested an excused absence.

The Durham County Department of Social Services was represented by the following: Interim Director Sarah Bradshaw, Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy and Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman; Assistant Directors: Rhonda Stevens, Jovetta Whitfield, Janeen Gordon, Margaret Faircloth, and Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason.

DSS staff attending included: Candice Leathers, Latoya Chambers, Meghan Russ, Nancy Santos, Kalindra Ellerbe, Lee Little, Quannah Jackson-Brown, Shontelle Smith, LaVelle Chesney, Susan Lee, Jennifer Moon, Lynn Thomas, Christie McMillan, Pamela Purifoy, Emma Perry, Tonia Gay, and Montrella R. Springfield.

DSS Human Resources Analyst James Hart attended the meeting.

Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs was present.

Public participation: Sarah Packard, 807 W Mangum Street Apt. 243 Durham, NC 27701 attended the meeting.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the March 15, 2023, Durham County DSS Board meeting to order at 3:01pm.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs welcomed everyone to the meeting and read the Public Charge. The Board of the Durham County Department of Social Services asks its members and citizens to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous manner, both with the Board and fellow citizens.

At any time, should any member of the Board or any citizen fail to observe this public charge, the Chairman will ask the offending person to leave the meeting until that individual regains personal control. Should decorum fail to be restored, the Chairman will recess the meeting until such time that a genuine commitment to the public charge is observed.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked everyone to state their name and address before speaking.

### **Public Comments**

None

### **Approval of the Agenda**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs moved forward with the review and approval of the proposed agenda.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith moved for the approval of the proposed agenda. Board member Charles I. Mitchell seconded.

The proposed agenda was unanimously approved.

<b>Board member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstained</b>
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Board member Janice P. Paul	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested a motion to approve Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman's excused absence. Board member Charles I. Mitchell moved for the Board to excuse the absence of Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman from the March 2023 DSS Board Meeting. Board member Janice P. Paul seconded the motion. The excused absence received unanimous approval.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested amending the minutes to make a correction on page three and asked for a motion for the approval of minutes from February 15, 2022, regular meeting with noted amendment.

Board member Janice P. Paul offered a motion to approve the minutes with the noted amendment and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The voice vote was unanimous by the DSS Board.

<b>Board member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstained</b>
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Board member Janice P. Paul	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		

### **Low-Income Homeowner Relief Program – Janeen Gordon**

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon presented the Low-Income Home Relief Program as recently also presented to the Board of County Commissioners at their Budget Retreat. A copy of the presentation will be placed with the minutes.

Her presentation included some history of the program (started in 2022 as a partnership with Durham County Tax Office to provide financial assistance to low-income citizens), funds spent/remaining, program outreach efforts and discussion around revision of the eligibility criteria.

Referring to potential changes, she advised the program was reviewed to see what might be handled differently in 2024 to make sure residents in Durham are receiving the tax relief needed (funds maximized effectively).

Recommendations included in the presentation were made to the BOCC, and they recommended not changing the amount of the allocation for the program. The recommendations included continuing to extend the program for a period, allowing the program to open year-round for ongoing efforts throughout the year, following up with those who have received assistance to make sure that the money received has continued to stabilize their housing situation. Also, offering additional supports in other program areas. Examining the assistance system and possibly offering 100% tax assistance to those less than 30% AMI. These were some of the recommendations presented to the Board of County Commissioners to consider that would help the most vulnerable. If the funding amount are the same, another consideration is to reduce the homeowner requirement to one year to assist first home buyers. Assistant Director Gordon has additional information for the Board if desired.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Janeen Gordon and AAS staff for running the non-mandated program. She acknowledged the program can't be handled through the Tax Department.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith commented about the impact of the program and asked if there were people adversely impacted because they did not apply properly or obtained needed funds from the program. Is there a tracking mechanism in place?

Assistant Director Gordon did not have any data about those receiving the funds but the main reasons for someone not being eligible include that they are already receiving subsidy, utilizing another tax exemption program or are above AMI. Program Manager Lee Little mentioned reaching out to Duke Research Department. They are doing research on all the applicants that requested a followed-up phone call. Data has not been received; however, the data will be used to enhance the program and make recommendations. There will be meetings with additional stakeholders throughout the community to confirm receipt of information. Another implementation is case management services. Social workers have been contacting applicants needing a referral resource or a follow-up phone call.

Board member Janice P. Paul inquired about the one-year program requirement and the impact in terms of money and projections. Program Manager Little conveyed it would be difficult to give projections at this time. Other counties are utilizing one year versus five. Chair Commissioner Jacobs replied one of the goals was to prioritize displacement of longtime residents due to the impact of gentrification relating to seniors and people with fixed incomes. Decreasing the years did make a difference, the number of applicants doubled.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs emphasized the importance of community outreach. Durham passed the largest bond referendum in history which will probably have a tax increase.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about a recommendation for the DSS Board. Assistant Director Janeen Gordon suggested prepping for the recommendation to provide formal approval at a later date.

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman mentioned DSS is at \$357,000.00 for the program overall. The County \$202,309 and City \$154,497. There is a need to maintain the shared administrative expense for running the program. The program could be cut to \$625,000 and put forward \$375,00 from the County and \$250,000 from the City.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs indicated allocating what you need and can justify in the budget. Chair Commissioner Jacobs thanked staff for the presentation.

## **Updated Guidelines and Protocol for Placement of Children – Jovetta Whitfield**

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield presented the Agency's revised Guidelines and Protocol for Placement of Children (document provided to the Board) and stated the purpose for presenting was to inform the DSS Board of an update to protocols and guidelines for placing children who are medically fragile and have medically complex needs. She advised DSS recognizes the importance of Durham children remaining in family venues within their community and not placing them in congregate care facilities. She furthered stated amendments and updates will probably continue due to full implementation of the Families First Prevention Services Act.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Whitfield for the step by step and clear process. There are many things to comply with and follow strict regulations. Assistant Director Whitfield stated there are a lot of guidelines for staff. The state has policies and local counties develop the protocols and guidelines to ensure policies are utilized.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield and staff for their very important work.

## **DSS Board Report**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the any changes due to the ending of the public health emergency related to food and nutrition.

There is a lot of national news coverage and there are different stories about eating healthy food. There is a major concern relating to seniors in the community.

There will be a Dementia Community Event to create an inclusive community of understanding, advocacy, and support. The event will be Saturday, April 29, 2023, at the Health and Human Services Building. The event is scheduled from 10am-2pm, no cost and lunch will be served. Jay Reinstein is the keynote speaker. Durham County DSS is one of the sponsors. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs will forward the information.

BOCC work session was held, Alliance Health delivered good news about additional support services for children and families. A regional crisis center for children and youth will open soon in Durham. Also, a mobile crisis unit for children and families that is supposed to arrive with a 45-minute timeframe along with therapeutic services.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield added Alliance is securing private providers for therapeutic relief. They are working on creating a plan with a private agency which will provide some therapeutic relief when youth are in the building or with resource parents. They possibly can stay with them overnight if they are in the building. This will help staff to focus on cases and address other needs. Child and Family Services Managers attend the monthly mobile crisis unit meetings.

### **DSS Director's Report – Interim Director Sarah Bradshaw**

Interim Director Sarah Bradshaw provided information from a recent NCACDSS Executive Board Meeting. One of the main topics is child welfare. Children and inappropriate placement sleeping at DSS. She advised the state is seeking a first-ever Kinship Subsidy Program and flexible funding for counties for child welfare vs. just counties being reimbursed for filled positions.

Senate Bill 156 was introduced and if passed will create a statewide Medicaid Managed Care Plan for child welfare children and families.

Interim Director Bradshaw advised the MA Expansion bill was currently up for a third reading in the NC General Assembly. If the bill passes, it cannot be implemented until there is agreement on a related budget and until CMS approves for NC.

There are concerns regarding the impact of the ending of emergency allotments for food and nutrition as of March 1, 2023. Leadership listened on the 100 County Director Call earlier. Several thousand letters have been mailed and will continue. Customers will be calling and coming to the agency about FNS and Medicaid. The agency must be staffed, and technology in place for the changes and increase in caseloads. Communication to staff is essential so they will be prepared mentally and physically. Interim Director Bradshaw expressed the significance of communicating the impact and preparation in the coming months.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Interim Director Bradshaw and appreciated the sentiment of togetherness within the agency. The DSS Board supports the agency and are willing to assist. The DSS Board is aware of the hard work staff are doing and the impact they are facing in the coming months.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs requesting a timeline for benefit changes and any data of the impact in the community to help the Board understand the big picture. Interim Director Bradshaw indicated the request was reasonable because the State is forwarding information via multiple communications and trainings.

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens will provide additional information about staff trainings.

The USDA is providing program changes North Carolina can continue to provide to customers. Information is available relating to emergency allotments received in Durham County and active caseload for FNS and Medicaid.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs did not set a deadline due to current priorities. Interim Director Bradshaw will provide a PowerPoint presented during the Director's Call which included statewide data.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Interim Director Sarah Bradshaw. Board member Janice P. Paul conveyed gratitude for keeping things together and stepping into challenging times.

#### **Family Economic Independence (FEI) – Rhonda Stevens**

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens conveyed an additional topic was added to the FEI report titled Program Unwinding. Medicaid – The agency is receiving weekly report to review and resolve to prepare cases. Effective April 1<sup>st</sup> NC Health Choice will end, and children will be moved to another form of Medicaid. Food and Nutrition Services – FNS Emergency Allotment ended February 28, 2023. A lot of the waivers for FNS will remain in place until June.

Medicaid staff are attending mandatory training to prepare for the changes due to the increase in caseloads.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Stevens for adding the new section and acknowledged staff keeping the numbers up with all the challenges.

#### **Customer Accountability and Talent Development (CATD) – Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason**

Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason highlighted QAT staff have been working hard creating refresher training for income maintenance caseworkers because of the public health emergency ending. Staff will be required to utilize policies and procedures in determining eligibilities prior to the pandemic.

Calls have increased, along with walk-ins and this will possibly increase due to FNS recipients receiving their benefits.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs pointed out the flyer created about FNS. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens and Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason worked on desk references and flyers for temporary staff use for client calls.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs mentioned the people reaching out to the food banks and pantries. Interim Assistant Director Cason conveyed a poster was created for the receptionist area for clients when they come in which includes a QR code for resources. Interim Director Bradshaw reassured there is a lot of work in process to connect to the public.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs thanked Interim Assistant Director Cason and CATD staff.

### **Child and Family Services – Jovetta Whitfield**

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield announced Durham County has been selected as one of the pilot counties for Safe Babies Court. This will begin in July 2024 or 2025. Chair Commissioner Jacobs offered congratulations and mentioned BOCC Carter advocated for Durham County. Assistant Director Whitfield reminded everyone to wear blue on March 31<sup>st</sup> for Child Abuse Prevention, take a picture and forward to her.

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### **Aging and Adult Services – Janeen Gordon**

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon talked about the Food Insecurity Task Force. A meeting was held with Meals on Wheel representatives to discuss ideas. A presentation will be made to the BOCC when a budget is developed. There are ideas about supporting seniors that will be impacted because their benefits will go from about \$200.00 to \$23.00 per month. There has been discussion around how to prepare The Senior Center and Meals on Wheels to address the needs of the senior population.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked about the amount listed for burial assistance for 350 people this month. Program Manager Meghan Russ replied the number is for the year.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs asked if the seniors waiting for in-home assistance and Meals on Wheels are the same people in both categories. Program Manager Lee Little stated they can be reflected for both.



Chair Commissioner Jacobs requested finding out because there are 148 people wanting for in-home and 252 waiting for Meals on Wheels. Assistant Director Janeen Gordon will provide the information requested.

Board member Janice P. Paul inquired about guardianship and whether the demands increased, decreased, or remained the same since COVID. Also, has APS reports increased? Program Manager Lee Little indicated guardianship increased and there were a lot of deaths. APS reports have increased over the last 2-3 years.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Aging and Adult Services for the report and work they continue to provide to Durham citizens.

### **Business Operations – Margaret Faircloth and Kelly Inman**

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman reported the parking deck will open March 27, 2023, and staff will be notified via email.

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth communicated DSS is currently waiting for schedule to meet with the County Manager regarding the budget. Also, awaiting to hear the results on the AOC internal audit for child support. Resolutions and testing were provided for the findings.

Also reported was that Bridgette Coleman Senior Child Support Agent in Child Support is retiring the end of March. She has thirty-one years of services. Program Manager Quannah Jackson-Brown pointed out Ms. Coleman's wealth of knowledge and assistance to staff. She is very low-key and will be presented with a plaque from DSS. She will be thoroughly missed in Child Support. Board member Janice P. Paul asked about staff receiving county recognition for years of service. Chair Commissioner Jacobs commented on the County Annual Celebration for staff reaching milestones. The previous celebration was held at the Convention Center.

### **Vacancy Report – James Hart**

James Hart, HR Analyst, highlighted the hiring managers are filling positions. New hires are coming onboard and training for programs. Staff continue to receive promotions growing in their career within the agency. Attending in-person events for recruitments. A Career Expo with UNC, The Battle in the Bull Career Expo, and conversations with workforce board on future events. Contacting local colleges, a lot of graduations in May which will be a great opportunity.

Working collaboratively, because of urgency and priority placed in filling positions. James Hart acknowledged administrative staff working behind the scenes.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs accredited James Hart for the data and numbers reflected in the report and the effort regarding recruitment.

Chair Commissioners asked if there was any more business requiring the DSS Board attention before going into closed session.

Hearing none, Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs moved for the DSS Board to go to closed session to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character fitness, conditions of appointment or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee, or to hear or investigate a complaint, charge, or events by or against an individual public officer or employee. General personnel policy issues may not be considered in a closed session. A public body may not consider the qualifications, competence or performance character fitness appointment or removal of member of the public body or another body and may not consider or fill vacancy among its own membership, except in an open meeting. Final action making an appointment or discharge or removal by public body. Having final authority for the appointment or discharge or removal shall be taken in an open meeting. The DSS Board voted unanimously to move to closed session

The DSS Board returned to regular meeting. No action taken.

The meeting was adjourned by a majority vote.

Respectfully submitted

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Chairperson

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Date

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Secretary to the Board

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Date