

Durham County Board of Social Services

Regular Session Minutes

May 17, 2023

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, May 17, 2023, in conference rooms 2421 & 2422 with a virtual option as well.

The following DSS Board members were in attendance: Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs, Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman; Board members: Jacqueline Beatty-Smith and Janice P. Paul.

Board member Charles I. Mitchell received an excused absence.

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

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

Danielle Briggs, Senior Assistant County Attorney was present.

James Hart, DSS Human Resources Analyst attended the meeting.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the May 17, 2023, regular meeting to order at 3:01 pm.

Public Comments

No public comments

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to approve an excused absence for Board member Charles I. Mitchell. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith offered a motion to excuse the absence of Board member Charles I. Mitchell and Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman seconded.

The excused absence was unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the proposed agenda. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman offered the motion to approve the proposed agenda and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The agenda was unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		

Approval of Minutes

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the minutes from the regular meeting on April 19, 2023.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith offered a motion to approve the minutes and Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman seconded.

The minutes were unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		

Chair Report

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs shared that County Manager Kimberly Sowell recommended a new position for a DSS Compliance Manager at the May 8, 2023, BOCC regular meeting. She highlighted that DSS has the highest number of 477 employees to be impacted by the compensation study. She also mentioned that a huge part of the county manager's budget is the salary increases that will significantly impact DSS. County Manager Kimberly Sowell is proposing a 10% salary increase (7% across the board + 3 – 4% merit increases). The minimum living wage for Durham County will be brought up to over \$19/hour.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs highlighted the changes being proposed with the Senate budget. She mentioned the certificates of need for hospitals and clinics and the proposed salary increases for state employees and teachers.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested an update regarding the impact of the public health emergency ending, foster care housing vouchers and the recommendation and budget for the Low-Income Homeowners Grant Program.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked DSS for supporting and sponsoring the Dementia awareness event.

Director's Report

Director Maggie Cveticanin submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Cveticanin thanked the staff for hosting and Program Manager Lee Little for attending the Dementia event. She was very pleased with the turnout.

Director Maggie Cveticanin presented a PowerPoint presentation about the DSS Program Changes due to PHE (Public Health Emergency) Unwinding. She reiterated that the department received one position and will be looking internally to move positions around to fill the void to some capacity. The department did not receive the funding for Northwoods Traverse (case management tool for IT) however there is a discussion with the County about using ARPA funds like other counties to fund this project. The department will have the ability to fund it after the first two years of implementation. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman added that \$11.2M was earmarked for ARPA dollars relating to Goal 5 (technology to support government efficiencies). \$500,000/year for two years is needed with tech services in the first year and FEI and Child Support in the second year. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman for an overview of the project and

the payback for this investment to be shared during the BOCC budget work session. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman answered that she has an overview of how other counties have used ARPA funds. The department has been working with County IS&T for 18 months building out Microsoft-related tools using dynamics and focusing on programs that are specific to North Carolina Departments of Social Services.

Director Maggie Cveticanin informed the board that the department did a soft launch with expanding the lobby hours on Monday, May 15, 2023. The expanded lobby hours will be effective starting on Thursday, June 1, 2023. As of Monday, May 15, 2023, the staff will work in the office twice weekly.

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens stated that the changes for Food and Nutrition Services will be taking effect on July 1, 2023. She highlighted the following three changes: (1) the end of the state extending the certification period (2) waiver of the eligibility interview and (3) telephonic signatures. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens discussed that Program Integrity is not establishing the claims that occurred during the pandemic. The Medicaid division started the work in February 2023 and the state asked for cases to be held in preparation for the new changes beginning on July 1, 2023. Individuals that have been receiving benefits will start losing them. The state is trying to support the eligibility of Medicaid in anticipation of the expansion coming. The state will be extending waivers for certain Medicaid recipients that receive FNS benefits, and a straight-through processing method will look at certain criteria of case files to see if Medicaid benefits can be continued for individuals. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens expressed that it would be a smoother rollout on the counties if these processes were in place to assist the counties without touching all of the cases being impacted. Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy added that the department is concerned about the impact of the phone calls and the clients coming into the building inquiring about their Medicaid status. The straight-through processing is significant because of the need for more manpower due to the anticipated impact. The department is glad that the state will be looking at ways of assisting with the process upfront. Director Maggie Cveticanin said the state will be looking to send out additional funds to the counties possibly by the end of May or later. She will keep the board members posted as soon as concrete information is shared.

Director Maggie Cveticanin was excited to share that the department won an award. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman further explained that CompTIA PTI (Public Technology Institute) honored the County's Phase II Emergency Rental Assistance Program as a public safety, emergency management and community resiliency category winner for technology advancements. CompTIA PTI's significant achievements recognition was awarded to the County for work

in improving services to employees through a new internal web portal and strengthening disaster recovery and business continuity efforts.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Director Maggie Cveticanin for her report.

Vacancy Report

HR Analyst James Hart submitted a written report.

HR Analyst James Hart reported that the vacancy rate has been dropping steadily and with the county manager's proposal there should be some stability as staff are waiting in anticipation of salary increases. The department is working on hosting a job fair next month and will share more details at a later date. The department's goal is to fill key positions and continue to promote staff from within. HR Analyst James Hart stated that over the summer the data will be analyzed to see the impact of the sign-on bonuses for Income Maintenance and Child Welfare divisions. The combination of internal management competencies, pay-for-performance measures to ensure the salaries are appropriate to the market, a 7% salary increase, merit increases, and the final proposal range will help with retention. Salary adjustments will be made after the completion of the compensation study if needed.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired if there was an influx of new graduates. HR Analyst James Hart answered that many graduates are applying and hopefully the job fair will capture more of them. He is working on finishing the internship project. Director Maggie Cveticanin applauded HR Analyst James Hart and Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy for coming up with a plan after she asked them to quickly come up with an idea for an in-person job fair. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman thanked Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield for speaking with her Child Welfare students in the past and she informed everyone that she will be teaching the course this summer and again in the fall. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith asked if the Deputy Director position for Social Services is on hold. HR Analyst James Hart replied that this term is used when positions need more thought around the job description and structure. This will also give Director Maggie Cveticanin more time to learn the processes and procedures. Director Maggie Cveticanin responded that she wanted to take the first 30-45 days to ensure a concise process of being thoughtful about what was being put into the job description and bringing the new person on board.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked HR Analyst James Hart for his report.

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

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens commended the program managers at the Teams meeting for all of their hard work. She highlighted that there have been some changes in the Work First program, which has increased the number of applications being received. Individuals can now apply through the NCDHHS ePass (<https://epass.nc.gov>) website whether or not they have children. The staff is reviewing the applications and trying their best to ensure that they are determining services promptly.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired if the 11% timeliness rate for April in (SAA) Special Assistance for the Aged was correct. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens answered that it is correct. This area has three vacancies and has never had that many applications not processed timely.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs wanted to know more information about the Child Care Food and Nutrition Services pilot. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens informed the board members that a new unit was created in Child Care services that handle Food and Nutrition cases. The pilot was in April and focused on processing as many cases on the same day as possible. The department is trying to experiment with some new processes before July 1, 2023. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs expressed her appreciation and thanked everyone that participated in the pilot and for being creative.

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

Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason submitted a written report.

Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason highlighted that the reception area staff were trained in preparation for servicing more clients with the reopening of the lobbies. On Monday, May 15, 2023, the Applications lobby did a soft launch, and 500 walk-ins were seen. The reception staff were champions and were very positive working through this process. She also acknowledged the QAT staff for their outstanding work in training the various program new hires with assisting the regular staff. Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy reflected on how the soft launch was a paradigm shift for all staff involved in the process. The department has been operating differently for three years. This was an opportunity to assist staff with any concerns and to prepare for the agency to return to a pre-pandemic state. Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason, Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman, Assistant Director

Rhonda Stevens, Information Technology Manager Kalindra Ellerbe and Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy spoke to clients starting from outside the main entrance through the hallway and to the lobby to hear about their experiences. The soft launch was also a way to learn from the perspective of the clients. Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy expressed her appreciation for Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason, Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens, all the program managers, Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman, and her staff for all of their hard work. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs applauded everyone that was a part of this operation. She also thanked Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason for stepping in and seamlessly helping the department at a great time of need. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith commended Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason's team for doing a virtual scavenger hunt to relieve stress and to take time out for self-care. She stated that it is a wonderful thing and should be continued.

Child and Family Services (CFS) – Jovetta Whitfield, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield announced that May is Foster Care Month. In recognition of Foster Care Month, several employees will be joining resource families today at the Durham Bulls Athletic Park for a baseball game. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield informed the board members that the FYI (Foster Youth to Independence) vouchers are handled by DHA (Durham Housing Authority). The division is partnering with DHA through our LINKS program and making referrals as necessary. A few of the youth have received vouchers and had concerns about the property. The LINKS coordinator and supervisor met with Life Skills Foundation, the landlord of the property and DHA to explain the repairs needed before any further referrals can be made to that property. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked if a process could be developed where the foster parent or applicant that applied is notified when the application has been filed. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield answered there is communication between DSS and DHA regarding the application status and to notify the applicant.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield stated that five years ago four pilot counties participated in the Family Engagement Committee where youth and families are invited to sit with staff to look at some of the internal processes and procedures. Durham County is the only pilot county remaining. She happily informed the board members that her division had been invited by the state to present at a virtual international conference in October 2023. The division will share more information after the proposal has been submitted. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs was excited to hear the fantastic news.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs questioned if there was a particular reason why foster care documentation was down for the past two months, but the expenses remained about the same. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield replied that front loading of services being assessed ensures that the right decisions are made for the youth. Currently, the adoption baseline has been met with 28 adoptions for the fiscal year.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield for her report.

Aging and Adult Services (AAS) – Janeen Gordon, Assistant Director

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon submitted a written report.

Program Manager Lee Little highlighted the rise in Adult Protective Services and guardianship referrals. He reported that the department is receiving about 25 referrals a month. The Special Assistance In-Home Unit is continuing to work on the waitlist. In April, two social workers joined the unit and are currently being trained. The Low-Income Homeowners Relief Program has a temporary staff member currently working on the waitlist. The numbers for Medicaid Transportation continuously rise due to clients' needs.

Program Manager Lee Little shared a PowerPoint presentation with the board members about the Low-Income Homeowners Relief Program. Last year's spending budget for the LIHR Program was \$750K county-funded and \$500K city-funded. The total spent last year was \$357K with \$202,309 being county-funded and \$154,497 being city-funded. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired if seniors aged 65 and older were included. Program Manager Lee Little answered that seniors aged 60 and older with a 30% AMI or less would be included. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman commented that the age would be added to the slide. During the launch year, the LIHR program received 339 viable applications with 200 applications being approved and averaging \$714.76 of assistance per household. In FY '23, the program received a 28% increase in applications, totaling 435 viable applications and currently 328 applications have been approved. The program closed on January 31, 2023, in accepting new applications. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thinks the presentation was great and appreciates that the decision was backed by the data. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman remarked that the classification/compensation study along with the administrative expense and the shared expenses with the city will boost those associated salaries. The program will be adjusted from a six-month program to a twelve-month program. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked if the tax office was informed about the adjustment. Program Manager Lee Little replied that the tax office was notified

at a meeting last Friday and agreed with expanding it to a year program. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs questioned if the recommendations had been submitted to the county manager. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman replied that the recommendations will be submitted at the city/county work session and after this board agrees to it, then the recommendations will be submitted to the county manager. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs informed Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman that she will need to attend a budget work session for each government separately. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs will follow up to ensure that the recommendations are added to the county work session and Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman will reach out to the city government. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs questioned the board members about their opinions concerning the recommendations. Board member Janice P. Paul acknowledged the staff for their great work on the recommendations and that it is a solid foundation backed by data. She also stated that it was nice that the department had assistance with the research. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith agreed that the recommendations were clear and easily understandable. She inquired about the collaborative approach to increasing program outreach with faith-based organizations. Program Manager Lee Little responded that Senior Public Information Officer Pamela Purifoy delivered flyers to numerous faith-based organizations. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith asked if the department received any feedback on this effort. Program Manager Lee Little said that the LIHR application will be revised to include a field specifying how the applicant learned about the program.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs complimented Program Manager Lee Little on the importance of the narrative and thanked him for his report.

Business Operations (BO) – Kelly Inman, Chief Operations Officer

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman submitted a written report.

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman expressed that the budget discussions, ERAP and LIHR were the main focus. ERAP (Emergency Rental Assistance Program) is one of the business office's initiatives. She shared the Housing Stability/Eviction Diversion Unwinding of Federal Funds PowerPoint presentation with the board members. Program Manager Meghan Russ discussed that before the pandemic in 2018, Durham County had 9,480 evictions. This is the highest number of evictions per capita in North Carolina. Presently in 2023, with the assistance of Eviction Diversion funds, there have been 5,901 evictions. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman reported that Durham County received \$25M through federally funded programs and another \$6M through Durham Relief (city program). Durham County dollars being funded directly to clients (Eviction Diversion and Opening Doors) total

about \$1.3M. As of May 1, 2023, ERAP 2.0 has \$2.3M remaining with an average monthly spending of \$388,000. The county will have about five to six months before the funds are depleted. After these funds are exhausted the county budgeted dollars are \$180,000 for the year. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked them for the presentations and suggested that both PowerPoints be presented together to the Board of County Commissioners and City Council during their budget sessions.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked if a social worker could be present at the courthouse to assist with the eviction case. The community is concerned about warnings of evictions on their records which could affect future rental inquiries. Meghan Russ stated that the department has rental assistance that can assist before eviction. Program Manager Lee Little further explained that in a previous discussion, two social workers would be at the courthouse before the rent was executed to prevent eviction. The social workers would process an application and if the client was eligible then a letter would be provided stating that the client is eligible for a specified amount of funds.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs applauded the department for more effective and efficient practices along with community partnerships.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs adjourned the DSS Board meeting at 5:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairperson

Date

Secretary to the Board

Date