

Durham County Board of Social Services

Regular Session Minutes

December 17, 2024

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Tuesday, December 17, 2024. The DSS Board Meeting was hybrid, in-person attendance in Conference Rooms 2421/22.

The following DSS Board members were in attendance:

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs, Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith, Charles I. Mitchell, Wendy Sotolongo and Dionne Moore.

The Durham County Department of Social Services was represented by the following: Director Maggie Clapp, Deputy Director Valery Dambreville

Assistant Directors: Margaret Faircloth, Jovetta Whitfield, Travis Williams, Latoya Chambers (Interim), and Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman.

DSS staff attending included: Felicia Cameron, Lynn Thomas, Pamela Purifoy, Jackie Proctor, Nancy Santos, Emma Perry, Meghan Russ, Christie McMillian, Laura Foy, Shewanda Edwards, Quannah Jackson-Brown, , Anthony Sturdivant, Shontelle Smith, LaVelle Chesney, Carole Trimble, Susan Lee, Tonia Gay, James Hart, and Montrella Springfield.

Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs and Deputy Attorney Geri Ruzage were present.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called December 17, 2024, regular meeting to order. Board member Charles I. Mitchell read the decorum.

Public Comments

Sheryl Smith and Minister Raziq Zaidi, Nation of Islam were present. Attendees were given five minutes to voice their concerns.

Commissioner Wendy Jacobs Resignation from Department of Social Services Board

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs has served on the DSS Board for twelve years. Commissioner Stephen Valentine newly sworn to Board of County Commissioners has been appointed to the DSS Board beginning in January. Commissioner Stephen Valentine has a background in social work and will serve as liaison on the Board of County Commissioners. Chair Commissioner Jacobs expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of DSS and acknowledged the accomplishments. DSS is an important department in Durham County Government because of the care of people in the community, providing vital services for survival. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs conveyed advocacy will continue for DSS. Chair Commissioner Jacobs recognized the DSS Board for their support, along with Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs. DSS leadership, management, and staff were saluted for their dedication and hard work.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo stated Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs' leadership has been vital to the success of and change in growth of Department of Social Services. The support which is given from the BOCC level as well as DSS Board level.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith applauded Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs' dedication and committed to the vision of DSS along with making everyone feel inclusive. Thank you for your dedication to the DSS Board and the Durham Community.

Director Maggie Clapp thanked Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs for the support given to DSS and encouragement with the changes which included exempt from the hiring freeze. Chair Commissioner Jacobs will always be a part of DSS. A plaque will be presented upon receipt.

Election of New Officers

It is customary for the Vice Chair to move up to Chair. Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith was offered the position of Chair of the DSS Board. Due to other obligations, the Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith declined.

Board member Charles I. Mitchell was nominated from the floor to Chair the DSS Board. The nomination was given by Board member Wendy Sotolongo and second by Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith. Board member Charles I. Mitchell accepted the nomination.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		
Board member Dionne Moore	Yes		

The DSS Board members voted unanimously.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell thanked the DSS Board for the opportunity to serve as Chair. Commissioner Wendy Jacobs was acknowledged for the service and support rendered to the citizens of Durham, the DSS Board and the Department of Social Services.

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Charles I. Mitchell asked board members to review the proposed agenda for approval. Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith offered the motion to approve the proposed agenda and Board member Wendy Sotolongo seconded.

The agenda was unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		
Board member Dionne Moore	Yes		

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of November 26, 2024, regular meeting were unanimously approved. Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs offered the motion for approval of the minutes followed by the second from Board member Wendy Sotolongo.

The minutes of the November regular meeting were unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	Yes		
Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		
Board member Dionne Moore	Yes		

Chair Report

Chair Charles I. Mitchell expressed gratitude to everyone. Chair Mitchell emphasized the holiday season and the needs of the citizens of Durham. Staff were recognized for their commitment to providing services for those requiring assistance. Chair Charles I. Mitchell emphasized the importance of spending time with family and taking time to focus on yourself.

Director's Report- Director Maggie Clapp

Director Maggie Clapp submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Clapp congratulated Chair Charles I. Mitchell.

Director Clapp informed the DSS Board reports were shortened due to the early meeting in December.

Director Maggie Clapp mentioned the Low Income Energy Assistance Program began December 1, 2024. Temporary staff are in the process of being hired to assist with applications.

DSS Leadership Academy has been established and will start early next year. Deputy Director Valery Dambreville and Human Resources Analyst James Hart were recognized for developing this initiative. Staff are excited and interested in participating in the academy. This will not interfere with the County Leadership Academy. Staff requested something to focus on DSS to be able to enhance their career and move forward. The curriculum will last for 12 months, and 12 staff will be selected through the application process. Director Clapp will forward the packet to the DSS Board for review.

Director Maggie Clapp and Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth attended the County Budget Kickoff on December 11, 2024. There will be nothing new added to the budget, therefore, looking at the current budget to evaluate what can be moved around.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo inquired about the eviction funds from the City. The City is funding Legal Aid. Director Clapp, Assistant Director Travis Williams and Program Manager Meghan Russ attended the Joint City/County Meeting. Information was conveyed regarding individuals coming to DSS when they are being evicted. The City is looking for data, but once an individual receives assistance they are not eligible for a year. Information has been requested from Legal Aid. Program manager Meghan Russ contacted Legal Aid about data and data is not tracked. Director Maggie Clapp suggested contacting the City and asking them to work with Legal Aid to track data for at least a year. Funding for eviction diversion will probably be depleted in April or May.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith gave a shout out to staff involved in the LINKS program. It was a great celebration; a lot was learned about the program and the impact on the young people. Director Maggie Clapp recognized Cody Lallier, Child Welfare Social Worker for doing a great job with the LINKS program.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell was unable to attend the Cooke Bake-off but acknowledged the division's participation and staff receiving remote days. Director Maggie Clapp invited the Grinch as taste tester for the event.

Director Maggie Clapp pointed out that the DSS Board Chair signed the Wait List for Child Care Services which had to be revised to place a vulnerable population in a separate section. The document was approved by the DSS Board, the format was the only change and requires Chair signature.

Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs attended the Pre-housing Task Force meeting which includes the City, County, Durham Public Schools, and Housing. The discussion was around immediate needs for unhoused people. and another item was day shelter services because Durham does not have day services.

Also, emergency housing, which includes safe parking for families living in cars, tenting for people living in tents and pallet homes, specifically for people who need more supportive services. The HEART program and others are creating a proposal together. Information will be forwarded to Director Clapp.

Family Economic Independence (FEI) – Latoya Chambers, Interim Assistant Director

Interim Assistant Director Latoya Chambers submitted a written report.

Interim Assistant Director Latoya Chambers highlighted staff working within the community and participated in a Holiday Pantry Volunteer Event.

FNS Recertification passed timeline in the month of November. 95.14%. The vision is to be more involved in the community and interact with clients.

Two new hires scheduled to begin employment, and FEI should be fully staffed in January.

Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the childcare wait list decreasing. According to Program Manager Tonia Gay it was higher last month because as families failed to recertify they come off, and a few families fell off the approved wait list. The decrease does not mean the need is not there. Staff are following up and getting the verifications needed so terminations don't occur. If individuals do not certify they have to apply for the waiting list. When more funding is received, or the state allows them to be pulled from the waiting list. DSS spending is currently at 95%, therefore unable to pull from the waiting list.

Medicaid –Assistant Director Cynthia Cason

Assistant Director Cynthia Cason submitted a written report.

Program Manager Jackie Proctor highlighted Medicaid Expansion one year anniversary as of December 1, 2024. Approximately 590,331 individuals are enrolled statewide including 15,574 in Durham County.

Durham passed the report card at 98% in November.

Open enrollment continues, for the month of November a total of 2349 applications were received.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell acknowledged staff for their accomplishments with Medicaid Expansion.

Customer Accountability and Talent Development (CATD) – Deputy Director Valery Dambreville

Deputy Director Valery Dambreville announced the hiring of the new Assistant Director Bila Louima.

Assistant Director Bila Louima gave a brief introduction. Assistant Director Louima worked as a supervisor supporting child support, childcare, aging and adult along with child and family services. The goal is to strengthen current relationships and build new internal/external relationships and cultivate continuous improvement across the organization.

The vision is to build and increase support for the agency as a whole. Assistant Director Louima worked previously in Johnston and Wake Counties.

The DSS Board welcomed Assistant Director Bila Louima.

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

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo pointed out the number of applications for holiday assistance along with above normal work requirement. Also, the appreciation of the support from the community supporting families.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield mentioned support for families and referrals come from across the agency for Thanksgiving and Share Your Holiday.

Director Maggie Clapp thanked the DSS Board for their generosity.

Assistant Director Whitfield conveyed Child and Family Services division meeting is scheduled for December 19, 2024. Speakers from NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, One More Child Sex Trafficking and a refresher on a few child welfare policies as we prepare to move into 2025 Staff who assisted in Buncombe County will be recognized.

Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs acknowledged the trends in foster care going down. A lot of work has gone into a downward trend from July to November.

Assistant Director Whitfield noted a lot of internal work review cases and courts catching up to the deficit experienced since COVID. The goal is to prevent children from coming into care and diverting to in-home services. DSS continues to work with home builders, hopefully, more slots for Durham region. More feedback will be available, Durham will be a pilot county.

The Safe Babies Court will begin in January and probably will impact decreasing numbers involving children with mental health conditions and the younger population.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith requested a presentation to the DSS Board around the LINKS and associated programs because of the positive impact on young people.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell commended Child and Family Services for their hard work.

Aging and Adult Services (AAS) – Assistant Director Travis Williams

Assistant Director Travis Williams submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Travis Williams applauded AAS social workers for their participation with Share Your Holiday. Over 215 referrals were made along with workload, gifts were delivered to clients.

Interviews are in process for the social worker position, new social worker started last week and candidates for the program manager have been received.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell extended congratulations to Lee Little on his new position in Wake County.

Board member Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked about the Low Income Homeowner Relief Program. There will possibly be an impact next year due to property evaluation. Currently, \$797,000 remains of \$1.5 million funded for the program.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell thanked Assistant Director Williams for the AAS report.

Finance - Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth submitted the Finance Report.

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth asked if there were any questions.

Assistant Director Faircloth conveyed attendance at the budget kickoff, and it was transparent, the budget team and county leadership gave foresight on what to expect this year. The current funds and spending will be closely viewed to support initiatives and what is being done this year.

Assistant Director Faircloth pointed out Christie McMillan will be retiring at the end of December and wanted to recognize her for commitment and service to DSS. Christie McMillan thanked everyone for their support.

Assistant Director Faircloth asked about Low Income Homeowner Relief numbers. According to Mrs. McMillan the difference in the funding and spending is related to the eligibility of 60 year old whose whole tax amount can be paid.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell inquired about no findings relating to the audits.

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth replied no findings at this time.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell thanked Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth for the Finance Report.

Operations – Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman

Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman submitted the Operations Report.

Program Manager Quannah Jackson-Brown asked if the DSS Board had questions regarding the report.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo inquired about the social worker position in Child Support

Program Manager Quannah Jackson-Brown is reviewing candidates for the position. The approval is from January 2025 through December 2025.

Anthony Sturdivant, IT Manager mentioned tickets are being reviewed and closed out appropriately. Also, 389 tickets were closed in for the month of November. Only three tickets were carried into December.

Director Maggie Clapp expressed appreciation for the Anthony Sturdivant work and wealth of knowledge mentoring staff.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell thanked Mr. Sturdivant for the support and work within the agency.

Vacancy Report – James Hart

James Hart submitted the Vacancy Report.

The vacancy rate is currently 10%, which has not been since 2020. There have been strategic changes mentioned with reclassification to critical positions, training in different divisions, and extension of probationary periods.

James Hart, HR Analyst talked about the DSS Leadership Academy and additional training.

Also, forty staff have been promoted in various roles and staff transferred to other programs in the agency. The relationship with County HR has been beneficial.

Board member Dionne Moore commended James Hart and Patrick Draughn for accepting the invitation to come to NCCU in March for the partnership collaboration. NCCU graduation is in May, therefore, social workers can learn about the opportunities that exist at Durham County DSS. Board member Dionne Moore mentioned Tatiana Graham-Robinson participation.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith thanked James Hart and staff for achieving 10%, along with the promotions resulting from cross training and assisting staff with opportunities with the organization.

James Hart agreed more opportunities resulted with Medicaid Expansion with additional positions. Supervisor level positions and lead positions have given staff more opportunities. This is a strategic point in being able to leverage some of the vacancies that were more turnover and transition into areas for more stability. Looking at how to strategically place vacancies and provide the level of permanency to staff. Furthermore, providing support and understanding the dynamics will help get through probationary period and tenure. Thanks to Director Clapp and leadership for their support.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell expressed gratitude to Director Maggie Clapp and James Hart. Chair Charles I. Mitchell commented on being a state government employee and limited paths through promotions and DSS has promoted many speaks volume. The process should be a model for others.

Director Maggie Clapp revealed James Hart creating a retention unit next year. One of the big things coming is a core supervisor orientation training to promote from within the agency. New and ongoing supervisors need supported training to keep up with change.

Director Clapp conveyed Durham is number five in the State for Medicaid Expansion and thanked Program Manager Emma Perry for the information. Mecklenburg is number one, followed by Wake, Guilford, Cumberland and Forsyth and Durham.

The DSS Board thanked Commissioner Wendy Jacobs and wished everyone happy holidays.

The DSS Board Meeting was unanimously adjourned by the DSS Board members.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairperson

Date

Secretary to the Board

Date