

Durham County Board of Social Services

Regular Session Minutes

March 20, 2024

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, March 20, 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 and Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman; Board members:, Charles I. Mitchell, and Wendy Sotolongo.

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

Assistant Directors: Margaret Faircloth, Rhonda Stevens, Jovetta Whitfield, Cynthia Cason (Interim) Kimberly Lincoln (Interim) and Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman.

DSS staff attending included: Candice Leathers, Latoya Chambers, Meghan Russ, Nancy Santos, Kalindra Ellerbe, Quannah Jackson-Brown, Shontelle Smith, LaVelle Chesney, Susan Lee, Pamela Purifoy, Tonia Gay, Emma Perry, Lee Little, Carole Trimble, and Montrella Springfield

Danielle Briggs, Senior Assistant County Attorney was present.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the March 20, 2024, regular meeting to order. The public charge was read by Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs.

Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs presented an overview of the DSS Board's responsibilities at the March meeting and recommended revising the public charge for the DSS Board Meetings. Senior Assistant County Attorney Briggs agreed to revise the language appropriately and submit it to the DSS Board for review.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs emphasized the public comment period is for comments and not an opportunity for response related to cases. DSS must protect the confidentiality of some issues.

Public Comments

Public comments were made by Amanda Wallace and Antoinette Hass'. Ms. Antoinette Hass' address 5610 Catskill Court Durham NC 27713. Ms. Hass reported good news related to her son returning home from DSS custody. He is currently attending college. Ms. Hass asked for consideration when making decisions regarding medication for children.

Ms. Amanda Wallace, founder of Operation Stop CPS. Ms. Wallace said she is tired of giving public comments talking about the same thing over and over. The reunification is not happening, and people are scared to speak without the threat of going to jail. Children sleeping in the building were mentioned and money spent on foster care. Chair Commissioner Jacobs reminded Ms. Wallace of five minutes for public comments.

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

Approval of the Agenda

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the proposed agenda. Board member Wendy Sotolongo offered the motion to approve the proposed agenda and Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman 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 Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested a motion to excuse Board Member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith from the meeting. Board member Wendy Sotolongo off the motion for an excused absence for Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey Hyman seconded.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

Approval of Minutes

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to approve the minutes for the February regular meeting. Board member Wendy Sotolongo offered a motion to approve the minutes 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 Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

Chair Report

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs talked about the budget retreat with the County and recognized Director Maggie Cveticanin for doing a great job.

Program Manager Meghan Russ presented at the Joint City County Planning Meeting and did an excellent job. One of the topics is related to funding for rental assistance which is running out. Staff have worked with Legal Aid on revisiting the program.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs requested an update on the program. Director Maggie Cveticanin recommended the need for \$1.3 million dollars of City and County funding for emergency rental assistance. Additionally, funding for the year is needed to assist applicants. The amount is similar to the low

Income Relief Program another non-mandated program managed by DSS. Approximately fifty percent of people in the community are renters.

The Tax Free Evaluation will be coming through the County will be in place 2025 and will assist people in the community.

Director Maggie Cveticanin mentioned Program Manager Meghan Russ completed an assessment which was difficult due to ERAP and COVID. Based on the assessment \$1.3 million is needed for funding. Program Manager Russ worked with Legal Aid and the result was that people would not have to be in eviction court to benefit from funding, referrals would come from Legal Aid. Two units under Program Manager Russ are being cross trained to assist with eviction diversion. Legal Aid signed off on the three changes. A meeting was held with the County Manager and Budget and there were no updates about additional funding until the end of the year. Funds were moved from Open Doors to help, but funding will run out before June and there is no other funding available.

The luncheons for staff are April 9th and April 18th, more information will be sent out. DSS has 600 staff and luncheons had to be divided due to space and a sign-in sheet will be drafted for staff attendance. Staff have been very supportive throughout the challenges and deserve recognition.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs conveyed information regarding Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman seat on the DSS Board. Chair Commissioner Jacobs requested moving forward with the posting and Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman can remain on the DSS Board until the seat is filled.

Director's Report

Director Maggie Cveticanin submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Cveticanin reported the State is moving away from NC FAST for Child Welfare information system. The contract was awarded to Deloitte which will take several years to implement. The State does not anticipate changes. The State released the 2024-2025 County Budget, and it was used to draft the budget for the County. Counties will be able to increase reimbursement for case management and candidates for foster care.

The State is also launching a community partner engagement plan to ensure the voices of NC communities and families continue to be at the center of departments work. The plan will include a new website, improvement to internal processes for engaging community partners and groups with logical experience to make policy changes best serve people in NC.

A new Statewide Peer Warmline was launched to work with NC 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. This will give callers the option to speak with a Peer Support Specialist. Peer Support Specialist are recovering people with mental and/or substance abuse. They will be available 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Medicaid Report Card Waiver was granted to all eligible counties in February, and they are working on an additional blanket waiver with CMS due to Medicaid Expansion occurring at the same time as Continuous Unwinding.

The air quality on Queen Street has been resolved and staff have relocated to that area. Todd Andrews and Terracon presented to all staff in the Human Services Complex.

The FEI leadership team and Director Cveticanin met with the CCR Consultants to discuss processes and internal policies. The meeting was very productive and upon completing FEI division they will be moving to Medicaid.

The Budget meeting with the BOCC was held March 12, 2024, and DSS presented the budget to County Manager and Finance. The County was impressed with efforts to reallocate resources within the agency and the time study to make sure resources were moving appropriately.

The discussion at the NCACDSS meeting consisted of Hold Harmless for the county by state which does not include DSS.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the Statewide Warmline. The press has not come out but has started working in tandem with NC 988. Individuals are being referred to the Warmline. Chair Commissioner Jacobs asked if Public Information staff could promote the new resource. Director Cveticanin suggested reaching out to Public Health as well.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs about the DSS Board officially voting and approving the budget before sending it to the County Manager. Senior Assistant County Attorney Briggs conveyed previous years the Board consulted with DSS then submitted a cover letter with the budget. The County Manager presents it to the Board of County Commissioners.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requesting the DSS Board weigh in this year because of the flat budget and departments are being asked to propose cuts. The concerns are about DSS mandated programs and decreased revenues.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman asked for more information related to the cuts. At the budget retreat Budget and Finance reported sales tax revenues were declining and there is a funding gap with continuing with things as they are now. The 20% increase in health care costs with the same benefits. There is a hole in the county budget without considering new requests and requests from Durham Public Schools. The extra money from the government is going away. Vice Chair Dr. Holsey-Hyman acknowledged Chair Commissioner Jacobs continuously advocates for social services.

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth pointed out there are federal and state reimbursements and when an expenditure is cut revenue is cut. The County sent out the exercise to cut budgets by 5% and 10%. In their presentation 5% would be \$899,00.00 and 10% almost \$1.8 million.

The percentages for non-mandated services came up to \$109,000.00 at 5% and \$218,000.00 at 10%.

The State is cutting checks for the energy programs and the expenditures are in the DSS budget. DSS is not spending because the checks are cut at state level. There is \$2.2 million on DSS expenditure that will not affect revenue. Chair Commissioner Jacobs asked for clarification about funds being received directly. The check will be issued directly from the State which started in December. If something happens a funding authorization from the State which would come to the Board for approval to put in the expense and revenue line. Non-mandated programs will not be eliminated. Administrative dollars which is 100% County dollars are being utilized on current staff. The \$750,000 is the County portion not the City which is reducing to \$550,000 below spending. Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth mentioned scenario three would cut a majority of non-mandated programs.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman expressed concern about cuts because families need assistance.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs emphasized County departments have been asked to complete the exercise but it is not final. Chair Commissioner Jacobs suggested writing a letter articulating the Board does not support cuts because of the importance to the community. The Board of County Commissioners have to vote as well.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth for the input. The community depends on services and is critical to people's welfare and wellbeing.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested permission from the DSS Board to work with Director Cveticanin and Assistant Director Faircloth on a letter giving support for scenario one.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo moved the DSS Board delegate Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs to work with the DSS Director and staff to draft a letter outlining the Board position regarding the proposed cuts. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman seconded the motion and asked to emphasize that the Board really doesn't want to cut anything.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman	Yes		
Board member Charles I. Mitchell	Yes		
Board member Wendy Sotolongo	Yes		

The vote was unanimously approved. The letter will be sent to the DSS Board for review.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs explained scenario one is a pass through program removing cuts \$2.1 million from the official budget but not changing any services that people receive.

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

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens indicated March madness has started, looking at ways to get cases processed, and at the same time acknowledging staff for their effort. Each week will be highlighted in FEI's April Report. Also, looking at the number of cases staff are completing, and the number of families set up for supportive services.

A new program for the summer for children to be able to receive some additional benefits during the summer. Funds will be placed on EBT or separate cards. More information will be provided in detail in April. Director Cveticanin signed and forwarded the agreement.

Also, highlighted Work First passed timeliness for assisting with applications.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about working with Durham Public Schools to get the word out about the summer program. The program will be coming through the schools. Individuals have to make sure addresses are correct by March 25th or 28th in the school system. Chair Commissioner Jacobs emphasized the need for community awareness for those receiving free and reduced lunches.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs asked about the childcare report stating 215 families waiting for providers. This is very disturbing because parents are unable to work due to childcare. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens mentioned they are reaching out to childcare resources to assist families. Since the pandemic providers are no longer providing services.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo asked a question relating to the priority list and how long the priority status lasts. The DSS Board approved the status, however, currently there is no wait list. People are being served as they come in. Childcare has first priorities even though numbers were reduced in the past. DSS continues to serve those eligible for childcare and has not moved anyone off the priority list.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs had a question related to Work First. Some employers are providing higher wages and benefits, and other wages are low. Individuals' job skills and opportunities are reviewed to encourage a person to take a job to get in the workforce.

Medicaid – Interim Director Cynthia Cason

Interim Director Cynthia Cason submitted a written report.

Medicaid Long Term Care staff met with three facilities to inform them of the changes within the Medicaid Division and met staff. A Question and Answer session was held along with sharing an overview of the long term care program. Quarterly visits will continue to keep facilities abreast of any changes. Staff from the facilities will have an opportunity to visit Social Services and meet with staff.

DSS has partnered with Lincoln Community Health Center. Applications will be taken for uninsured, and staff will be located in the adult clinic. A staff member is located at Urban Ministries two days per week.

Medicaid enrollment participants as of March 5th, is at 9989, which is halfway. By the end of April, the number of participants anticipated is 11,000.

Durham County projected 22,000 applicants for Medicaid Expansion.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman expressed gratitude for staff working in the community and interested in how people in the community know they can go to the facilities. The information is provided to the community through the media and people coming to the facilities are asked if they are interested in applying for Medicaid.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs plans to mention at Lincoln's Board of Trustees Meeting. Chair Commissioner Jacobs thanked Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason and staff for working overtime. Emails have been received from individuals in the community commending staff for the services provided.

Customer Accountability and Talent Development (CATD) – Kimberly Lincoln, Interim Assistant Director

Interim Assistant Director Kimberly Lincoln highlighted the training for a Work First new hire using internal staff and resources despite vacancies. Staff working together training new hires on services.

Program Integrity hosted the State Region Three Meeting in Durham on March 14, 2024. It has been several years since the meeting was held in Durham.

The Call Center continues to see an increase in the number of calls received each month. In addition to over 2000 calls from prior months they continue at 98% ratio, along with providing customer service to Durham County citizens. There are four bilingual staff assisting in the Call Center.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Interim Assistant Director Kimberly Lincoln and CATD staff for handling multiple areas within the department and presenting data in different reports.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs followed up on the shortage of conference rooms and cubicles. DSS have more staff and are they sharing space. Can other buildings be utilized. Director Cveticanin is working with the County Manager about additional space.

Interim Assistant Director Lincoln recognized Public Relations Officer Pamela Purifoy for the monthly newsletter provided to the community and DSS.

Business Operations (BO) – Kelly Inman, Senior Operations Officer
Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth

Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman highlighted Northwood case management system and database migration. The County approved data change which is great news. There are eight Information Technology projects going on.

Starting April, Child Support Court will be reduced to one per week. A big transition time for courts moving to the Odessey system in April. There will be a mock court on April 2nd and go live on April 29, 2024.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested the background leading to the reduced court. They are trying to consolidate due to bringing in travel judges.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo expressed concern with the change causing problems in other areas. Also, will there be special training for the agents and have other counties been contacted who already transitioned. Staff are going to Wake County to observe the transition to the new system and the mock court will be for Child Support Agents, Attorney along with other staff.

Board member Sotolongo asked about the social worker for Working for Children Program. Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman explained the social worker for the program is through the incentive dollars to assist with locating custodial parents needing help. If they are underemployed or unemployed helping them to find work to support their children. They are referred by agents, and attorneys.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman for the report.

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

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield asked the DSS Board if they had questions regarding the report submitted.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo posed a question about bridging funding for congregates for replacements in IV-E. due to the importance of most counties the last fiscal year and the impact. The State is implementing payments to non-licensed foster kinship care. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield is not sure of the impact; however, they are diligently working with community partners. DSS is working with Alliance Health trying to keep children in family settings, unfortunately, some youth must be in competent care and not sure of the impact to the budget. Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth verified children that are in the placement before the change will be grandfathered in and will receive funding. Assistant Director Whitfield clarified Durham County has always provided payments for kinship care. The past 27 years board rate has been provided to any kinship families thanks to the support from the County Commissioners. Now there will be some reimbursement.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs applauded Assistant Director Whitfield for meeting with the judges because collaboration is very important. Also, noticed the focus on Safe Sleep and Gun Safety. Someone has been assigned to the Gun Safety Committee. Safe Sleep is part of the Community Child Protection and Prevention Team. Individuals from the team are on the committee. Other community partners have been invited to help with planning. Durham County fatality issue is due to safe sleep. Working on some community outreach to talk to families and individuals about safe sleep and contacted Welcome Baby to participate.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman noticed the fifteen vacancies in Child and Family Services. Approximately 100 students will be coming out of MSW this semester. What is the status of the field placement person. With the child welfare collaborative changing, training is being implemented to incorporate in the new curriculum. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield will follow up with Interim Director Kim Lincoln and retrieve the information. Assistant Director Whitfield confirmed the child welfare collaborative was brought back.

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month and Child and Family Services is focusing on educating community partners on some policies and procedures. A lunch and learn is planned with the hospitals reaching out to doctors and nurses to help them understand parents' rights and needs.

May is Foster Care Awareness and planning to bring awareness to foster care with the focus on engaging youth building support and strengthening opportunities. Youth in the LINKS program are being utilized in the Family Engagement Committee meetings where their voice is important.

There continues to be challenges finding placements for youth with significant behavioral issues having to place outside of North Carolina. The Director's Association acknowledges this is a huge issue and continues to voice concerns to the State.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs reverted to gun safety team and informed of the gun locks provided for safes.. The person reassigned is from Child Protective Services and safety locks are being distributed..

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

Director Maggie Cveticanin commended Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield and staff for showing up working with Allies4Outcomes and Northwoods Traverse even with fifteen vacancies.

Northwoods recognized Child and Family Services staff as one of the best groups they have worked with on the project. Child Welfare is a stressful area, and positions need to be filled, this is a statewide issue. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman emphasized this has been a continuous issue and commend staff.

Aging and Adult Services (AAS) - Valery Dambreville, Deputy Director

Deputy Director Valery Dambreville submitted a written report.

Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) originally started in 2015 in collaboration with the City of Durham and is adding Granville County in April 2024. The HOPWA currently serves Durham, Orange, Person, and Chatham.

The Home Centered Care Team is working to add new clients to their caseloads by pulling 47 individuals off the waiting list. Approximately 23 assessed out of the 47 will be eligible for services. The decision to increase caseloads is driven by various factors including Medicaid enrollment, placement on other programs, relocating to a facility and deceased individuals.

Program Managers Lee Little and Meghan Russ presented at the State Region Three meeting and Durham hosted the MBT meeting.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs acknowledged Aging and Adult Services staff for the removal of clients from the waiting list.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman thanked Lee Little for providing coverage as Interim Assistant Director.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman inquired about a category for a consumer to be on the DSS Board. Guidelines are provided by the State. Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs conveyed the different models of DSS Board and board representation is determined by the State. Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs clarified that the DSS Board is made up of two Social Services Commission appointees, and Board of County Commissioners, Member of UMA Board of County Commissioners and the 5th member selected by the four members. That can be different in the Consolidated Human Services Group due to the larger body that includes social services and public health.

Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman mentioned concerns in the community and representation from the community is an idea. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield pointed out the Family Engagement Committee, a pilot from the State to have a parent voice at the table to help shape and form policies. This has been a State pilot the pass 3-4 years and now there is a youth voice and looking for a father's voice.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked about the status of the LatinX. Family group for the Spanish speaking community as well. No information on LatinX.

Assistant Director Rhonda Steven went back to a question regarding Day Care. Day Care Services are not stopped if the client status changes during the certification period. If they are not working they can job search, but if their income goes over the threshold it has to be reevaluated to continue service. If they change from homelessness, services continue. It is a 12 month period.

Vacancy Report – Director Maggie Cveticanin

James Hart submitted the Vacancy Report for April.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked management for attending the DSS Board Meeting.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs read the statute to move to closed session. NCGS 143-318.11(a) (6) 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 grievance by or against an individual public officer or employee.

The DSS Board moved to closed session with a unanimous vote.

The DSS Board returned to open session and Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairperson

Date

Secretary to the Board

Date