

Durham County Board of Social Services

Regular Session Minutes

May 15, 2024

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, May 15, 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 ; Board members: Jacqueline Beatty-Smith, 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, Jovetta Whitfield, Latoya Chambers (Interim), Cynthia Cason (Interim), Kimberly Lincoln (Interim) and Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman.

DSS staff attending included: Candice Leathers, 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, James Hart, and Montrella Springfield

Danielle Briggs, Senior Assistant County Attorney was present.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the May 15, 2024, regular meeting to order. The public charge was read by Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs.

Public Comments

No 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. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs recommended moving the Consent Agenda to the June meeting. Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs agreed. Board member Wendy Sotolongo offered the motion to approve the proposed agenda with noted amendment and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The agenda was unanimously approved.

Board member	Yes	No	Abstained
Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs	Yes		
Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith	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 March and April regular meetings. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith offered a motion to approve the minutes from the March and April meetings. Board member Wendy Sotolongo seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

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

Chair Report

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Director Maggie Clapp, Deputy Director Valery Dambreville, Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield, Program Managers Susan Lee and Carole Trimble for attending the Board of County Commissioners Meeting to receive the Foster Care Proclamation.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs conveyed the County Manager presented the recommended budget. Durham County is facing a difficult year with the decrease in new sales tax revenue. Last year the County received over \$12 million in new sales tax revenue and has declined to \$3 million. Next year projected only \$1 million in new sales tax revenue. All departments have been asked not to request positions and possible hiring freezes. DSS did receive critical positions for Medicaid Expansion which are partially paid with non-county dollars.

Other departments have been asked to submit a redaction, therefore, holding hiring and the reduction of budgets will save \$3 million. Durham

Public Schools requested \$26 million; the County Manager recommended \$13 million which is an increase from last year. The County Manager recommended \$950,000.00 for Pre-K. Employee compensation increase is \$13.3 million for County staff. The cost of living increases 3% for county staff, which is \$7.1 million and to implement changes from last year's compensation study \$6.2 million. There is additional money for eviction diversion. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Director Maggie Clapp and staff that worked on eviction diversion because it is important to keep people in their homes. The possibility of a 3.25% property tax increase will cause a burden to residents. Work sessions are scheduled for May 23rd, May 30th, June 3rd and approval is slated for June 10, 2024.

Director Maggie Clapp asked about information relating to the hiring freeze. Chair Commissioner Jacobs thinks it is for new positions and more clarification is needed. Director Clapp mentioned counties are having turnovers in Medicaid, increase cases in Food and Nutrition, Aging and Adult along with Child Welfare. Chair Commissioner Jacobs suggested following up with the County Manager. DSS positions are critical to mandated services. Human Resource Analyst James Hart added the last hiring freeze DSS did not have an issue with child welfare and income maintenance positions. Everything is different and would be an advantage to agency due to the nature of work in the community DSS could be deemed as a critical essential agency. Chair Commissioner Jacobs agreed with recommending DSS as critical essential workers.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs conveyed concerns from staff about the proposal for a two tier system for benefits. The cost of benefits has gone up and Chair Commissioner Jacobs will get more information. The County Manager has proposed a plan which includes payments. Employees will have two options to choose from if approved.

HR Analyst James Hart added Human Resources has scheduled a specific session across the county to discuss the possible changes in benefits. If staff do not enroll in the new plan they will be defaulted to basic plan and there will be no cost to employees. The deductibles are different, the level of coverage and the out of pocket expenses.

Director's Report

Director Maggie Clapp submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Clapp asked if the Board had questions regarding the report. Director Clapp reported more respite care centers will be coming, however, Durham will not have one. Gaston, Pitt and Vance will receive a respite care center and Durham will have access.

Staff luncheons were held on April 9, 2024, and April 18, 2024. County staff were invited for their assistance during the air quality issue. Director Clapp thanked the DSS Board for their support.

Director Clapp will be attending the RISE conference in California through a scholarship from NC Administrative Office of the Courts along with Roshanna Parker.

Durham will be starting a Safe Baby Court in the future. Deputy Director Valery Dambreville will meet with Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield, staff and Judge Walker.

Director Magie Clapp attended the State Director's Meeting in Wilmington, NC. Board member Wendy Sotolongo is on the State Advisory Committee for Safe Babies Court Board member Sotolongo proposed assisting as a resource for communication. Director Maggie Clapp thanked Board member Sotolongo and conveyed the directors were asked to join state committees. Director Clapp joined the Crisis Systems and Peer Support. The State is looking for input on strengthening the crisis systems around the state and pushing for peer support.

Director Maggie Clapp met with Child and Family Services Supervisors and acknowledged the great work in the division.

Audits are occurring at DSS which includes local, state and federal. Northwood Traverse is moving forward, and Director Clapp recognized Felecia Cameron for her leadership on the project. Northwood Traverse staff acknowledged Felecia Cameron management of the project.

Director Maggie Clapp commended all staff taking on the new case management system. Let's Chat meetings with staff are scheduled in early June.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Director Clapp for a great report and acknowledged all staff for engaging with various opportunities. Chair Commissioner Jacobs requested information regarding Family Drug Court and Safe Baby Court. Durham has a Drug and Mental Health Court which are successful.

Director Clapp conveyed Safe Baby Court is through Child Welfare. If a baby is born and there are concerns, DSS can go to Safe Baby Court which has a one evidence based practice they follow for parenting. The point is to get to permanency quicker and reunification. Family Drug Treatment Court is where a family that has substance use issues and they came into the child welfare system. This court helps to get to permanency faster and focus on family treatment and this will help with reunification as well. The courts will possibly be implemented in early 2025 depending on the work required and a one day meeting and training will be scheduled.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo mentioned the discussion in the advisory committee. Durham would potentially be the first county with both courts.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked about the funding and judges to provide leadership in the courts. The funding will be provided by the State and Judge Walker and a new judge will provide leadership.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo conveyed it is currently unfunded. The staff are AFC employees, and they are asking each county to pay for staff, but the extra cost for Guardian Ad Litem, DSS and parent attorneys and their staff have not been funded. CIP is covering the grant for extra cost for GAL and DSS. IDS is covering some extra cost for parent attorneys, but the conversation is continuing. Board member Sotolongo suggested Director Clapp contact the Director of New Hanover County for information.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs mentioned possible grant opportunities and thanked Board member Wendy Sotolongo for her leadership.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith asked about the internal audits by Traverse. Director Clapp clarified Northwood Traverse will not audit DSS and there are multiple audits County, State and Federal. Director Clapp asked Operations Officer Kelly Inman and Project Manager Felicia Cameron to speak on the areas requested. Deputy Director Valery Dambreville explained Traverse and the audits are separate. Traverse is a case management system. Child and Family Services Review is a federal review. The State of North Carolina picks out cases in large populated area that reflects a report card for North Carolina.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs moved forward with the division reports. Chair Commissioner Jacobs welcomes Interim Director Latoya Chambers for Family Economic Services.

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

Interim Assistant Director Latoya Chambers submitted a written report.

Interim Assistant Director Latoya Chambers asked if the Board had any questions. Meetings are scheduled with the CCR Consultants regarding the next steps. CCR conducted focus groups with staff, supervisors and program managers and received great feedback and suggestions.

Child Care Subsidy staff hosted an event with Child Care Services Alliance Association to get families that are approved to select providers. A second event has been scheduled for June and these continue every two months until families have selected providers.

Hunger Awareness Event scheduled for June 27, 2024. Staff will be asked to donate non-perishable items. Donation boxes will be placed in the breakrooms.

Timeliness for FNS recertification 96.54%, great job. The First Family Assistance Team had 100% for timeliness for applications and recertifications.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo acknowledged the steps taken for families needing childcare.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs agreed with the collaborative approach helping people through the process.

Medicaid – Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason

Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason submitted a written report.

May is Income Maintenance Month and several events have been scheduled throughout the month. Approximately 200 staff are income maintenance caseworkers. Staff came together for popcorn which was located in the courtyard. On May 23, 2024, certificates will be given to staff to recognize their hard work.

Approximately 11,000 applications have been received for Medicaid Expansion. The state anticipates 600,000 in 2 years and currently at 450,000.

Director Clapp indicated the state is estimating two million at the end of two years. The Medicaid Team and CATD staff were recognized for processing applications.

Interim Assistant Director Cynthia Cason mentioned the timeliness rate was met at 93% and the state was 90%.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs stressed the importance of recognizing staff and showing appreciation.

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

Interim Assistant Director Kimberly Lincoln highlighted the agencywide culture survey ended and 231 responses were received around the agency. The second group will have their first meeting to review the responses and look at areas for improvement within the agency.

Interim Assistant Director Kimberly Lincoln explained the Quick Response Reviews and how it is different from other reviews. Starting with the Child and Family Services. The regular QA reviews focus on compliance and the gives the state tool and QR. The Quick Response Review focuses on quality of services, which is a new tool developed by QAT. The 30 days include the quality of service received by clients during this period and the collaboration with the social worker. Also, this works with children receiving services. An event was held with Child and Family Services to talk about some of the changes.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs acknowledged the collaborative work CATD is doing within the agency.

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 inquired about the last paragraph regarding the difference between two home visits. There are five child welfare standards measured by the state and the two they are monitoring include initiation of assessments and monthly case work home visits. The total number of children in care and the total number that have home visits active at the end of the month was the percentage of face to face in home and that is the one they are focusing on. The other visit could be in the community at school or in the office. Staff have been consistently at 95% or higher averaging 97% per quarter on face to face visits. This is federal which goes from October 1st to September 30th. Both visits are calculated community and in-home, but the preference is completing 95% in home which allow staff to observe the home and talk to caretakers.

Assistant Director Whitfield mentioned the proclamation was received for Foster Care Month and highlighted the annual event at the Durham Bulls Ball Park. Resource parents, staff and their families were recognized for the support throughout the year. It was the largest group since having at the ballpark. Announcements about foster care and the need for resource parents are provided during the game. There will be other events during the month along with the radio campaign advocating the need for resource parents for 18 to 21 young adults. This year there is focusing on young adults aging out of foster care. Great activities coming through the LINKS Program focusing on college applications, finance, purchasing and maintenance on the car. The LINKS Coordinator provides different activities and does a great job working with the young adults.

Another single audit for the LINKS program with no financial impact. There is an issue with the Odyssey System getting cases heard in court.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo pointed out that a non-profit at Wake County Court provided cake, balloons and presents for an 18 year old aging out of foster care and court was paused. The contact information will be forwarded to Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Whitfield for the report and commented on the LINKS Program providing opportunities and resources. Also, a young man from the LINKS program is participating in in the Bulls Initiative funded by the County. The program connects youth to jobs in RTP providing BLOWWORKS certification at Durham Tech. Durham Tech has the Promise Program funded by the County that provides 4 years pay for anyone with a GED or high school degree from Durham. According to Assistant Director Whitfield young adults in the 18-to 21 program can receive free education for the state as long as they attend one of the 16 NC schools or community college. Some of the young adults are starting their own business.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs conveys a nonprofit named Echo is supporting entrepreneurship for youth. Also, data shows around the correlation between youth completing FAFSA forms.

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

Deputy Director Valery Dambreville submitted a written report.

Program Manager Meghan Russ attended Durham Center for Senior Life Gala fundraiser event. Great opportunity to connect with partners.

Program Managers Lee Little and Meghan Russ planned a division meeting for staff. Each supervisor talked about their program which gave staff clarity on the work in each unit. They are working on the first large Aging and Adult Services event in June for Elder Abuse Awareness Month.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about a proclamation for Elder Abuse Awareness Month being submitted to the County. The proclamation needs to be submitted before the last BOCC meeting in May.

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith mentioned hosting an open house for the community. The event could educate the community about the services. Director Maggie Clapp agreed it is a great idea and will work on it with leadership.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs mentioned approximately 140,000 residents receive services from DSS and Durham population is around 340,000 people, more than a third of receive benefits from the department. Inviting the community to DSS is a good idea. This could support the proposal to make DSS a critical agency.

Chair Commissioner Jacobs inquired about the surge in the Low Income Homeowner Relief Program. There were 426 applications approved and what attributed to the increase. Program manager Lee Little conveyed there were community outreaches, word of mouth and a meeting with the City of Durham.

Program manager Little emphasized the Elder Abuse Awareness Day scheduled for June 14, 2024, and plans for the event. The proclamation will be forwarded for the BOCC agenda and invitations will be sent to the DSS Board.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs noted that AAS does not have any vacancies.

Finance - Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth asked if the DSS Board had questions.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs had a question related to audits. Any concerns regarding the Emergency Rental Assistance programs and losing key employee.

Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth does not see any concerns at this time. The State hired a consultant group to assist counties in preparing for audits with ERAP. The information was submitted, and staff were commended on organized documentation. The first review was completed and currently waiting for the follow up questions.

Assistant Director Faircloth recognized Child and Services staff for the extra information for the audit. The final recommendation for the budget is continuing with monthly meetings with the Budget Office.

Business Operations – Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman

Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman asked the Board if they had any questions.

Child Support has been heavily impacted with e-Court.

Program manager Quannah Jackson-Brown pointed out the opportunity with AOC partners for training on filing codes. Conversations have been held with the clerk of court. The visit to Wake County included reviewing their processes and meetings with legal partners. Also, working with finance and the business office to making staff is connected to the appropriate payment accounts. This is a large undertaking for Child Support and leadership has been very supportive. Everything will be electronically filed, which is a change in the business process.

Meetings have been held with District Court Judges trying to increase efficiencies. The hard copy orders have to be scanned and downloaded and uploaded to the clerk's office which takes more time. Program manager Jackson-Brown commended staff for devoting time to changes to e-Court. There is still more work to do, there is talk about AOC providing scanners in the courtrooms that are directly connected to the e-Court system. County IT has to make sure the software required can be downloaded.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs mentioned the complaints in the newspaper regarding e-Court. Chair Commissioner Jacobs applauded the Child Support staff for taking advantage of learning from Wake County.

Senior Business Officer Kelly Inman acknowledged Child Support staff for their work on e-Court.

Senior Business Officer Kelly Inman announced IT Manager Kalindra Ellerbee is leaving Durham County. Kalindra Ellerbee thanked everyone for the opportunity to work at DSS.

Board members congratulated IT Manager Kalindra Ellerbee.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the Authentic Fatherhood Summit. Program Manager Jackson-Brown conveyed information relating to the Dr. Warren program which is a non-profit organization involving non-custodial fathers. Infancies are changing the face of child support and reimagining the understanding the connection with community resources to alleviate some barriers.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Program Manager Jackson-Brown for the report.

Vacancy Report – James Hart

James Hart submitted the Vacancy Report for May.

The vacancy rate is around 12%, trying to stay close to 10%. One of the challenges is to be aware of a hiring freeze. After the last hiring freeze it has taken two years to in a good place. The focus is on retention and maintaining staffing levels. DSS vacancies are reviewed during budget season, therefore, want to continue to keep the ratio at a safe place. HR Analyst Hart emphasized the need to be in a place to fill vacancies and not underestimate the effect at any time where we can experience vacancies related to work or other factors. Categorizing DSS staff as essential critical workers was suggested.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked the management team 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