**Durham County Board of Social Services**

**Regular Session Minutes**

**February 26, 2025**

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday February 26, 2025.

The following DSS Board members were in attendance:

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

The Durham County Department of Social Services was represented by the following: Director Maggie Clapp, Deputy Director Valery Dambreville, Assistant Directors: Jovetta Whitfield, Travis Williams, Cynthia Cason, Bila Louima, and Latoya Chambers.

DSS staff attending included: Pamela Purifoy, Theresa Long, and Montrella Springfield.

Insight Presentation Family Economic Independence: Katrina Arrington, Kamal Simpson, Elanna Johnson, Adolfo Rodriguez, Ellery Harris, Alesia Johnson, Tania Segers, Tasha Timberlake, Teffoney Grady and Marie Fuller.

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

Chair Charles I. Mitchell called February 26, 2025, regular meeting to order and read the decorum.

**Public Comments**

Sheryl Smith, Antoinetta Hawes, and Minister Raziq Zaidi, Nation of Islam (on-site) and Amanda Wallace, Maria Mejia (by phone), were present at the meeting. Attendees were given five minutes to voice their concerns. Public attendees requested copies of the board reports. Ms. Wallace requested a response from the DSS Board. Minister Raziq Zaidi requested a report on the carbon monoxide incident in the building last year. Attendees voiced concerns regarding personal issues.

**Approval of the Agenda**

Chair Charles I. Mitchell asked board members to review the proposed agenda for approval. Board member Commissioner Stephen Valentine 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 Stephen Valentine Yes

Board member Wendy Sotolongo Yes

Board member Dionne Moore Yes

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of January 22, 2025, regular meetings were unanimously approved. Board member Commissioner Stephen Valentine offered the motion for approval of the minutes followed by Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith second.

The minutes were unanimously approved.

**Board member Yes No Abstained**

Chair Charles I. Mitchell Yes

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith Yes

Board member Commissioner Stephen Valentine Yes

Board member Wendy Sotolongo Yes

Board member Dionne Moore Yes

**Division Insight – Family Economic Independence (FEI)**

A copy of the presentation will be placed with the minutes.

FEI consists of Food and Nutrition Services, Childcare Subsidy and Work First.

Katrina Arrington spoke on Food and Nutrition Services.

Kamal Simpson talked about Income Maintenance Caseworker’s daily task and assisting clients with applications.

Elanna Johnson conveyed Income Maintenance Caseworker’s daily task and processing client’s recertifications in person.

Adolfo Rodriguez presented on Childcare Subsidy. Durham County is operating a waitlist and currently has 255 families. A priority group was established to serve families on the waitlist.

Ellery Harris talked about Work First Family Assistance which is based on the premise that parents have a responsibility to support themselves and their children. Work First three strategies are diversion, work and retention. Refugee Cash Assistance provides income support for refugees not eligible for Work First Family Assistance or Supplemental Security Income.

Alesia Johnson spoke about Employment Services a component of Work First Family Assistance. This program focusses on mandatory participation and mutual responsibility.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell thanked staff for a great presentation and acknowledged leadership.

One question regarding the 255 families on the childcare subsidy waitlist. Currently, funds are not available, and the waitlist continues to grow. The waitlist is evaluated every March and September to contact clients to see if they want to stay on the waiting list. Once funding is available clients are pulled from the waiting list.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith commented on the statistics and passing the first month MOU performance standards in Work First Cash and Food and Nutrition Services. Work First Cash recertifications and application passed timeliness along with Food and Nutrition Services.

Director Maggie Clapp asked aside from no funding, is there another barrier for the people on the childcare waitlist?

Commissioner Stephen Valentine thanked staff for their commitment and inquired about how many days people stay on the childcare waiting list. There has not been a waiting list since 2019-2020. The waitlist began in September, clients are contacted to make sure they want to continue. When funds are available people are pulled from the waiting list. Assistant Director Latoya Chambers will provide additional information.

Commissioner Valentine asked staff about the refugee cash assistance program. No information has been provided regarding any changes with refugee cash assistance.

Board member Wendy Sotolongo expressed appreciation for the presentation and inquired about state funding for childcare subsidy. Funding sources received from Durham County and State will be provided.

Board member Dionne Moore appreciated the format and information relating to the presentation from staff. It was helpful to hear the processes and information. The information assists with conversations with students about what DSS does in detail.

Due to the sound interruption online, Chair Charles I. Mitchell re-opened Public Comments for two minutes.

Amada Wallace, Founder of Operation CPS, commented on CPS concerns and requesting response from email. Chair Charles I. Mitchell replied that the email has been received, and an answer will be provided. Board reports will be posted for review.

Maria Mejia concerned citizens commented on supporting families and inquired about the DSS Board duties.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell assured a statement will be released about the duties and responsibilities of the DSS Board.

Board member Commissioner Stephen Valentine commented about concern communication to citizens from the Board.

**Director’s Report- Director Maggie Clapp**

Director Maggie Clapp submitted a written report.

Director Maggie Clapp mentioned there is a lot of news and nothing has been confirmed. One concern is Medicaid Expansion in North Carolina if work requirement is approved. The legislation has passed in North Carolina. The concern is the childcare issue within the state. Childcare vendors are an issue as well, since COVID many providers did not reopen centers.

Director Clapp informed the DSS Board about the concern for health insurance for staff, an increase in employee premiums was mentioned in a meeting. Several staff had to remove their families from their insurance due to the increase last year.

DSS continues to get push back on capital expenses in the building according to the budget team relating to cleaning carpet. General Services is responsible for the building.

Director Maggie Clagg acknowledged Deputy County Attorney Geri Ruzage for assisting with challenges within the court.

Director Clapp announced all the leadership vacancies have been filled. Assistant Director Latoya Chambers accepted the position over Family Economic Independence.

Deputy Director Valery Dambreville was recognized for coordinating the monthly Division Insights presented at the DSS Board meetings.

Commissioner Stephen Valentine shared concerns about Medicaid with the local delegation.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith added if carpet cleaning is not DSS budget, does General Services have a plan to continue the service. Director Clapp does not know if General Services will continue the service, and added expenses will eliminate events. and other items will be cut back. DSS would have to evaluate the most critical needs for the agency.

Director Maggie Clapp conveyed changes in Medicaid Expansion will add more work for staff, there are no additional positions which will be an impact.

Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith commented on the health insurance for staff and their families.

Commissioner Stephen Valentine relayed to members of the board one of the priorities he will be looking at is the issue around notification. Various items are being discussed in the commissioner’s meeting. DSS needs to be able to show measures of completion.

Director Maggie Clapp indicated that items have been put in place, which include a line item to support families’ visitations on weekends and during the evening. The visits have to be in the community because security is not available in the building after closure. Staff can take families to the museum, arcade and purchase lunch.

Cases over 12 months are being reviewed quarterly by a team of people.

DSS is at a culture shift and staff are working on the change.

DSS is being held for unification issues they have no control over. Continuances have been tracked for the last three months, 14 continuances due to court. Deputy County Attorney Geri Ruzage is working with DSS. DSS does not have the final word in court, and information is shared with the Board.

Board member Commissioner Valentine agreed and emphasized the importance of communication.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell thanked everyone for their comments and moved forward to the reports.

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

Assistant Director Latoya Chambers submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Latoya Chambers reported the first month of MOU performance standards for Food and Nutrition Services and Work First Cash. Work First Cash applications and recertifications passed timeliness expectations with 100%. Food and Nutrition Services passed applications timeliness expectations with 98.14% and recertifications timeliness at 97.16%.

Assistant Director Latoya Chambers highlighted Work First Employment Program Manager is looking at their resource processes. The biggest item this year involves referrals.

**Medicaid – Assistant Director Cynthia Cason**

Assistant Director Cynthia Cason submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Cynthia Cason conveyed open enrollment ended and there was an increase in applications approximately 7000 in the three month period. There was an increase through open enrollment because individuals were eligible because of Medicaid Expansion. Medicaid Report Card timeliness rate 97%. Special Assistance timeliness rate 95% and Disabled Assistance rate 85%. Approximately 16,000 individuals enrolled through Medicaid Expansion in Durham.

There are currently 13 vacancies and 2 are pending in Human Resources.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell inquired about the pending help desk report. DSS has an Operational Support Team responsible for reviewing the tickets and the supervisor constantly follows up with the state. This is important because it hinders clients from receiving benefits.

Director Clapp added a long term care unit has been established, positions were reclassified for a lead worker and supervisor. Durham has one of the largest teams in the state. Director Clapp acknowledged Assistant Director Cynthia Cason for the reassessment of positions and establishing the long-term care unit.

**Customer Accountability and Talent Development (CATD) – Assistant Director Bila Louima**

Assistant Director Bila Louima highlighted Justin Byrd promotion to RMT Supervisor and being able to double intern opportunities at Durham DSS. The four interns from NCCU and NC State. One has been at DSS for two years and three are new studying social work. Assistant Director Louima conveyed with the support of Leadership and CATD they are definitely in a position to become full time employees.

There was a question regarding tracking interns in the program and eventually hired at DSS. A tracking mechanism will be put in place.

Board member Dionne Moore thanked everyone for their diligent efforts to provide quality and timely services to the community while meeting the state benchmarks.

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

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield emphasized the focus on reunification. Meetings are scheduled quarterly with the courts and parent attorney since 2018 with the goal of reuniting within 12 months which is the federal and state measure. Durham DSS is not where it should be, but the issue is systemic, representation from all collaboratives not available at meetings to discuss policy changes and challenges. The rate decreased from 40 to 35. Currently waiting for the final chart for the Service Review Report. The number of children in care is dropping, in July 2024 we had 226 children and as of January 31, 2025, we have 185 children in care. The number is decreasing in foster care due to the efforts in the community and education with partners. Meetings are being held with law enforcement, public schools and the health community. A training course is scheduled for March 10, 2025, relating to the reporting process. Staff are being encouraged to support non-defendant parents. Numbers will be provided at the March meeting.

The DSS Board acknowledges the challenges child welfare faces and applauds staff for their hard work. Also, suggested sharing the report upon receipt to the community about the decrease in children coming into DSS care.

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

Assistant Director Travis Williams submitted a written report.

The Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith mentioned meeting attended and property tax appraisal was conversed. Continue to communicate the tax relief program to citizens in the community.

Assistant Director Travis Williams highlighted monitoring including Adult Protective Services, Energy Program and Special Assistance In-Home. Programs were 100% for January. APS was benchmarked at 85% for abuse and neglect, however, both programs reached 100%.

AAS has a new home Care Center Supervisor Danielle Harris.

Chair Charles Mitchell highlighted in the AAS report the number of people becoming seniors each day and thanked Board member Commissioner Stephen Valentine for increasing funding mentioned earlier.

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.

Director Maggie Clapp reported the budget was submitted to the County and will be presented to the DSS Board in March.

The Finance Division was recognized by the DSS Board for no findings in the county audits.

Director Maggie Clapp pointed out that staff worked additional hours to complete the budget.

**Operations – Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman**

Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman submitted the Operations Report.

Senior Operations Officer Kelly Inman highlighted General Services has been supportive of getting new cameras placed in the building.

Child Support is on track with metrics, but they will be measurable at the end of the year. The Child Support Court has been reduced to one week over the past year.

One of the statutory requirements for DSS is to operate shelters during inclement weather if needed. This requirement, along with daily work responsibilities requires continuous readiness.

**Vacancy Report – James Hart**

James Hart submitted the Vacancy Report.

Director Maggie Clapp reported the vacancy rate is currently at 10%.

Internal promotions continue across the agency and seasoned staff are retiring. There will be continuous interviews for positions related to turnovers.

DSS is moving in the right direction. There has been turnover in Medicaid, staff are not experienced and don’t realize the intensity of the program along with the hard work it entails.

Chair Charles Mitchell inquired about the turnover relating to the retirement or other issues. Director Maggie Clapp stated that other counties are bringing staff back into the office full time and anticipated staff applying for vacancies due to the Durham hybrid model. Management is looking to hire skilled individuals.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell moved forward with the board training facilitated by Senior Assistant County Attorney Danielle Briggs. Senior Assistant County Attorney Danille Briggs suggested moving to closed session due to time constraints. Some of the training material will be covered in closed session.

Chair Charles I. Mitchell proceeded to move to closed session and read the statues. Motion was made by Vice Chair Jacqueline Beatty-Smith and seconded by Board member Commissioner Stephen Valentine.

The DSS Board returned to regular session no action taken.

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

Respectfully submitted,

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Chairperson Date

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Secretary to the Board Date