**Durham County Board of Social Services**

**Regular Session Minutes**

**March 16, 2022**

The Durham County Board of Social Services monthly meeting was held on Wednesday, March 16, 2022. The DSS Board meeting continues to be virtual due to the COVID-19 cases.

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

The Durham County Department of Social Services was represented by the following: Director William Rose and Deputy Director Catherine Williamson-Hardy; Assistant Directors: Krystal Harris, Jovetta Whitfield, Rhonda Stevens, and Janeen Gordon. DSS staff attending included: Candice Leathers, Latoya Chambers, Meghan Russ, Nancy Santos, Kalindra Ellerbe, Lee Little, Contessa Sawyer, Quannah Jackson-Brown, Susan Lee, Shontelle Smith, LaVelle Chesney, Lynn Thomas, Darlene Whitfield, Pamela Purifoy, John Kenion, Montrella Springfield and Loretta Roberts.

Tax Administration Director Dwane Brinson and Deputy Tax Administrator Teresa Hairston were present.

DSS Human Resources Analyst James Hart attended the meeting.

Senior Assistant County Attorneys Danielle Briggs and Bettyna Abney were present.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs called the DSS Board meeting to order at 3:02 pm.

**Public Comments**

No public comments

**Approval of the Agenda**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the proposed agenda. Board member Janice P. Paul offered the motion to approve the proposed agenda and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The agenda was unanimously approved by voice vote.

**Board member Yes No Abstained**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs Yes

Board member Janice P. Paul Yes

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith Yes

Board member Charles I. Mitchell Yes

**Approval of Minutes**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked the board members to review and approve the minutes from the Regular Meeting on February 16, 2022.

Board member Janice P. Paul offered a motion to approve the minutes as written and Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith seconded.

The minutes was unanimously approved by voice vote.

**Board member Yes No Abstained**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs Yes

Board member Janice P. Paul Yes

Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith Yes

Board member Charles I. Mitchell Yes

**Chair Report**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs highlighted the annual City/ County/ Durham Public Schools/Residential means-tested survey by a national company. She applauded DSS staff for the improvement of resident satisfaction. The new County Manager, Dr. Kimberly Sowell was welcomed on Monday, March 14, 2022, at the Board of County Commissioners Regular Session. Durham County made history with Dr. Kimberly Sowell being the first black female county manager. Chair Commissioner Jacobs is concerned that some of the ARPA funded pandemic benefits will be discontinued. The school nutrition program that has been beneficial to numerous children in our community may be impacted. There is a discussion that some of the medical benefits for uninsured people may be ending. The plans for additional COVID-19 measures and how to continue responding were removed from the recent budget approved by Congress. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs would like to have a conversation about transitioning to in-person meetings to be held in one of the larger conference rooms in the Health and Human Services building with physical distancing. It is very important for the board members to know what the staff is comfortable with.

**Director’s Report**

Director William Rose submitted a written report.

Director William Rose commended Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs on her excellent report. He highlighted that he is very excited to have County Manager Dr. Kimberly Sowell and looking forward to her joining a leadership team meeting in the future. The Board of County Commissioners approved $59,000 in Adult Protective Services (APS) funding for new expenditures. Adult Protective Services Supervisor John Margolis, Assistant Director Janeen Gordon & Program Manager Lee Little are working on a plan with the state to possibly expand some in-home services for the substantiated APS cases. John Margolis will discuss the adult services multi-disciplinary team next month.

Director Rose has received some information from national organizations regarding potential advocacy with the change in benefits and waivers expiring. He will inform the board members after more research is done.

***Covid Update*** – The reopening committee decided to delay opening the lobbies until the parking garage is completed. The committee is still focusing on taking the proper steps to reopen the lobbies. Under CDC guidelines, the mask mandate will remain in the HHS building due to Public Health providing direct clinical services. As COVID-19 continues to recede, we will streamline and operate in new ways. The staff will continue working remotely due to the parking situation. Director Rose suggested to consider the parking situation regarding the decision to hold in-person board meetings and maybe have a couple meetings virtually and one in person. The department will continue to have a small footprint in the building until the parking garage is complete. The new county manager has promoted flexibility with department heads about continuing work post pandemic. There will be more people in the building after the parking garage is complete. The staff and clients are affected by the high gas prices right now and this will be factored into the decisions as well. A new COVID-19 variant is in China, and we may possibly deal with another surge. We will definitely keep this on our radar.

The budget meeting with the new county manager will be held on next Friday, March 25, 2022. Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman, Assistant Director Margaret Faircloth, Administrative Officer John Kenion & Accounting Supervisor Christie McMillan have been working hard to put together the presentation in cooperation with our budget liaison Shannon Wright. The presentation is connected to managing for results and performance management to justify the areas of need. The MOU with the state will be used as a guideline to meet certain performance standards. My report last month discussed reallocation and reclassification to lower the requests. However, some requests have grown with the Special Assistance In-Home program and the change in the legislation. The department has a very reasonable budget packet and will reallocate quite a few positions and a few dollars to support some new positions. The driving factors consist of: Child Welfare with Families Moving Forward, Child Welfare Transformation and QAT. In April, Director Rose will give a budget update and may know about priorities that have been eliminated.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs inquired about the date that the 300 Parking Garage will be completed. Director William Rose answered that the estimates have changed, and it should be August 2022. The 500 Parking Lot will be unavailable between April 15 – April 30, 2022. We will be losing a lot of parking for the HHS building. Virtual board meetings will be the best option moving forward until more parking is available. Chair Commissioner Jacobs added that if the State of Emergency for North Carolina ends then we will be required to return to in-person meetings. The governor still has a State of Emergency for North Carolina which is allowing us to have virtual meetings for public boards and commissions. This is a factor that we will not have any control over. Chair Commissioner Jacobs thanked Director William Rose for his excellent report and highlighted the different awards that the DSS staff have submitted for North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and the National Association of County Commissioners. She appreciates and feels that DSS deserves to be recognized for all of their innovations. Director Rose stated that several projects are being submitted that include the ability to innovate and be creative along with building good partnerships. Board members Jaqueline Beatty-Smith and Janice P. Paul applauded the staff for their amazing work as well.

**Vacancy Report**

HR Analyst James Hart informed the board members that recruitment is continuing to move forward. The majority of the focus is on Family Economic Independence and Child & Family Services. The gas prices are an external factor that has been impacting recruitment, therefore HR is highlighting the benefits of the hybrid work schedule. The next external factor is that Wake County is offering staff leave and implementing retention bonuses that will be distributed to staff in three increments throughout the year (March, August & at the end of the year). Wake County has a county wide 18% vacancy rate with some departments as high as 20% or more. This shows that Durham is not the only county facing challenges with recruitment. HR has been flexible with salary negotiations for the difficult to fill positions in the candidate’s best interest. The staff is doing an excellent job responding to the new challenges while having to manage staff, being innovative and also recruiting in high vacancy areas. HR will adopt the county manager’s view of asking these questions: (1) what we are doing well that we should continue (2) what we are doing that we should stop doing and (3) what we are not doing that we should start doing. These critical questions will be compiled with the retention process. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs complimented James Hart for his great report. Chair Commissioner Jacobs informed James Hart that she told the County Manager Dr. Kimberly Sowell to contact him about his innovative ideas relating to recruitment and retention. She praised all of the staff pertaining to the pivot of the different work schedules. Director William Rose complimented James Hart for always being creative and compiling exit surveys that will be reviewed in the leadership meetings. The data will be monitored to see if there are trends or strategies to use to assist with retention. Board member Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman expressed admiration for the hybrid model and using innovative ways for social work practicing in the field. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith also admired James Hart regarding filling difficult positions and consistently proposing innovative ways to retain and recruit staff.

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

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens highlighted filling the vacancies in her department and recruiting individuals. It has been a challenge to get candidates in and some individuals have declined offers. Assistant Director Stevens applauded her staff for doing an excellent job to meet the program outcomes. She is requesting extra support from staff that have FEI skills to work on evenings and weekends to ensure that the clients receive their benefits timely. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens for her efforts in getting the work done. Chair Commissioner Jacobs acknowledged the department’s great work with the performance measures. She commended all of the assistant directors for their amazing work. Chair Commissioner Jacobs expressed gratitude for Rhonda joining the Cooperative Extension Advisory Council and wanted to know her thoughts about strengthening the relationships/partnerships and connecting DSS clients to Cooperative Extension’s programs and services. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens answered that there has been conversation around food security. In early summer, there will be a partnership with Mary Oxendine, and she hopes to have an update by the next meeting. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman inquired if the department connects with vocational and career counselors at Durham Tech and Wake Tech for prospective candidates upon graduation. She suggested that Vega Swepson would be the best contact person at Durham Tech. Assistant Director Rhonda Stevens answered that she will follow up and shared with Greg Bellamy on the NC Works committee that her department is recruiting. She also spoke with James Hart regarding a partnership with NC Works.

**Customer Accountability and Talent Development (CATD) – Krystal Harris, Assistant Director**

Assistant Director Krystal Harris submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Krystal Harris highlighted a presentation around the Racial Equity Taskforce Group and wanted to give an update. The group is starting to roll out activities and initial surveys to gauge topics of interest from staff to be incorporated into lunch and learn sessions. A virtual cultural fair will be held. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman teaches diversity and offered to present some culturally competent exercises at the fair. Assistant Director Harris will be reaching out to her for this opportunity. Employee appreciation gift bags were delivered to CATD staff acknowledging their hard work.

Assistant Director Krystal Harris informed the board members that the intern position was reposted with a new title and will give an update next month after it closes. Vice Chair Dr. Monique Holsey-Hyman requested for the position to be sent to her so she can post it in her class. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs expressed admiration for Assistant Director Krystal Harris’ incredible work. Chair Commissioner Jacobs suggested that pertaining to racial equity that Assistant Director Harris include the BOCC and the county manager, because there is a need for policies to be in place. Assistant Director Harris is working in collaboration with Public Health, Sheriff’s Office and CJRC meeting monthly to discuss ideas and collaborative work. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs asked about the interpreter position and if someone connected with Durham Tech’s program. Assistant Director Krystal Harris replied that Program Manager Darlene Whitfield reached out to Durham Tech and submitted an employee selection packet today. Two offers were previously made, and both were declined. This is an internal candidate. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs stated this is fantastic news.

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

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield highlighted the partnership with Duke is in the preliminary stages to show and question the definitions of child abuse and neglect and the trends/connections to medical disparities. We’re hoping that they are able to get the grant and move forward with a partnership. Durham is piloting the NC INCK (NC Integrated Care for Kids) innovative care delivery and payment model serving Medicaid and CHIPS (Child in Need of Protection or Services) ensured children from birth to age 21. Effective January 2022, the children that fall in the CHIPS category or Medicaid are automatically enrolled. The state and Alliance Behavioral Health are involved with this as well. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs was fascinated reading about NC INCK. She questioned how the program will work and if the family navigator will be more like a case manager. Assistant Director Whitfield replied that this program has a prevention focus from coming into care. Assistant Director Whitfield and Program Manager Shontelle Smith have taken lead on this pilot and ensuring that duplicate work is not occurring with Alliance, NC 360, and NC Care family navigators. Director Rose added that the focus is about care management and the total wellness of children and families. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs mentioned after reviewing NC INCK’s policy guides she was pleased to see the suicide screening tool being promoted with the increasing suicide rates.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs referred to the challenging vacancies and the increase of CPS reports and investigations between January and February. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield noted that there was a significant increase in the last month and a half in the CPS reports with physical and sexual abuse. The schools are doing more reports on truancy and speaking with the families about kids not attending classes. Board member Janice P. Paul inquired if the general truancy reports were neglect reports. Assistant Director Whitfield replied that truancy court no longer exists in Durham, but the elementary and middle school students have started mediation. There will be a presentation Friday, March 18, 2022, at Research Triangle High School regarding child welfare and the hesitancy in making reports or concerns about the functionality. The department will continue to do the community education which is one of their strategic plans. Senior Assistant County Attorney Bettyna Abney spoke briefly on educational neglect and filing petitions. Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield addressed the increase in vacancies due to the following barriers: (1) the reference check process has changed for some agencies and is taking over a month to complete (2) quality of the applicants and salary requests (3) resignations due to gas prices being high and having to commute to work; Chair Commissioner Jacobs recommended possibly having a gas subsidy to assist staff and suggested Ben follow up with the county manager. Director Rose stated that there is a discussion about finding ways to incentivize staff that come into work. Assistant Director Whitfield said that it impacts the field workers the most and wondered if the workers could be reimbursed twice monthly instead of at the end of the month to alleviate some of the pressure. Chair Commissioner Jacobs wants to get these innovative and flexible pivots out as soon as possible. She inquired since April is Child Abuse Prevention month will Assistant Director Whitfield be bringing a resolution to the BOCC. Assistant Director Whitfield will be working to get the resolution and the CCPT annual survey report on the BOCC’s agenda.

Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield stated that March is Social Work Appreciation Month and thanked the board members and Director William Rose for the gift cards received to be used for social work and the other celebrations. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Jovetta for all of her great work.

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

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon submitted a written report.

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon highlighted that more funds have been received in Adult Protective Services and in the Home and Community Care Block Grant program. The funds will be incorporated into the budget to ensure they are expended. The division is recognizing Social Work Appreciation Month by having a photo contest with the social workers submitting their photos to the program managers to vote and distribute awards. Assistant Director Janeen Gordon, Program Manager Lee Little and Program Manager Meghan Russ are working on a NACO submission for their work with the Low-Income Homeowner’s Relief Program. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs thanked Janeen for her report and added that she is glad to see that the department will have until January 2024 to address the change with the in-home personal services program. Chair Commissioner Jacobs asked Assistant Director Gordon to share the photos from the contest with the board members. Assistant Director Gordon will share the photos when all of them have been received.

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

Chief Operations Officer Kelly Inman submitted a written report.

Administrative Officer John Kenion covered for the division. He highlighted that on the expense report one of the fund centers was repurposed and is titled DCo Community Initiatives and will be reporting the ERAP II funds. This month will be the first full month of the new court schedule for Child Support. He announced that Child Support Supervisor, Laurie Hasty is retiring after 30+ years of experience working with DSS and Child Support effective April 1, 2022. There will be a shuttle running every 15 minutes between 6:30 am – 9:30 am and 3:30 pm – 6:30 pm from the offsite parking lots. On Tuesdays, due to Public Health’s late clinical hours the shuttle will run until 7:30 pm. The construction is slated to begin on the 500 E. Main Street lot beginning mid-April or beginning of May. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs acknowledged Administrative Officer John Kenion for his great report and thanked him for highlighting the fund center. She extended her gratitude and congratulations on behalf of the DSS Board for her more than three decades of service to DSS. She informed everyone that 300 E. Main Street will include a childcare facility and will hopefully be an incentive to staff. The 500 E. Main Street project will include a grocery store, retail, apartments, park, and a plaza.

**New Business**

Assistant Director Janeen Gordon introduced Program Manager Lee Little and Social Work Supervisor Contessa Sawyer’s presentation to identify long term homeowners in the low-income category needing assistance with their property taxes. Program Manager Lee Little thanked the board members for electing to do the program and the collaboration with the county tax office and numerous internal programs to fulfill the need. The PowerPoint presentation is attached. Board member Charles I. Mitchell complimented Program Manager Lee Little for his great presentation and stated that despite the denials it was good to see that a large number of people received funding from other places. Director William Rose joined in and attributed the awareness to Tax Administration Director Dwane Brinson and his staff’s outreach efforts. Program Manager Lee Little stated that the social workers were excellent throughout the program and provided additional information to applicants that did not qualify in order for them to receive assistance. Board member Jacqueline Beatty-Smith asked when a good deadline would be to vote on the program recommendations. Director William Rose responded by next month at the latest. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs suggested to wait until next month because she has some follow up questions for Dwane Brinson and due to the budget implications of Durham County Government and taxpayers covering the cost of this program. It is also important for the DSS Board to understand the estimated cost of changing the criteria. Program Lee Little said the average cost would increase from $700 to $8,000 and doubling it would be close to the output of $600. Chair Commissioner Jacobs wanted to know how many people would be served and the total budget. Program Manager Lee Little answered the average assistance amount was $714 and raising the tier could move it to $1,000 which would be 340 applicants received with 204 approved and could stretch the amount to $650,000. Chair Commissioner Jacobs stated that she believes that $750,000 was budgeted for the program. Director William Rose reiterated that the budget would be a combination of city and county funding and will be working with Tax Administration Director Dwane Brinson to get the best estimate. Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs wanted to know the approximate number of homeowners being served at which AMI and the estimated cost. Assistant Janeen Gordon stated further if Durham county’s benefit is greater than the federal benefit will it deter people from applying for federal programs. Chair Commissioner Jacobs agreed that Assistant Director Gordon made a very important point that the county should not exceed the federal benefit, because it will create an undue burden for taxpayers.

Director William Rose invited Senior Assistant County Attorney Bettyna Abney, Assistant Director Jovetta Whitfield, Social Work Supervisor LaVelle Chesney and Social Work Program Manager Susan Lee to the executive session. Board member Janice P. Paul commented about the executive session and suggested that the board acknowledge that the operation exists. The board will support DSS with this matter.

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs requested a motion to adjourn into closed session. Board member Janice P. Paul offered a motion to move to closed session and Board member Charles I. Mitchell seconded.

**Closed Session N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a):** (1) To prevent the disclosure of information that is privileged or confidential pursuant to the law of this State or of the United States, or not considered a public record within the meaning of Chapter 132 of the General Statutes. The information is confidential pursuant to **North Carolina General Statue § 108A-80 and § 7B-302 (a1).**

Chair Commissioner Wendy Jacobs adjourned the DSS Board meeting at 5:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted

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Chairperson Date

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Secretary to the Board Date