

CASS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD MEETING
March 5, 2018

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Bennett called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m.

Present: Vern Bennett, Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Rick Steen

Absent: Brian Hagen, Glenn Ellingsberg, Arland Rasmussen

Presenter: Chip Ammerman, Director; Terry Schmaltz, IT Director

I. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Peterson made a motion to approve the Board Minutes from February 5, 2018. Ms. Scherling seconded it. Motion carried.

II. Foster Care Overpayment

Mr. Ammerman gave an update on the matter the Department of Human Services requesting payment of \$375,000 for foster care services that were overpaid dating back to 2008 due to incorrect legal language. Mr. Ammerman sent an appeal letter on behalf of the agency and subsequently spoke with the director of DHS, Christopher Jones. Mr. Jones informed Mr. Ammerman that DHS is not pressing for payment at this time and is collecting information across the state for similar incidents, while recognizing the dual responsibilities of the state and counties involved; more information will be available in several months. Mr. Ammerman feels that there is a strong argument that the legal language in question was corrected in a later court order and the amount owed should be in the range of \$30,000 - \$50,000.

III. Update on projections for 2019 Budget and Review of movement within Social Services

Mr. Ammerman said 2019 is the second year that Social Services funding will follow mandates from Senate Bill 2206, and greater clarification is beginning to emerge. Data on caseload counts will be available in April and more accurate budget projections can be made at that time.

Mr. Ammerman said the agency has experienced several waves of retirements of long-term employees and another wave is anticipated to occur in five to six years. Efforts are being made to change the culture within the department to help employees manage workloads and to recognize the intensity and demands of the job. The department has been working with Sagency, which is a leadership consulting and recruitment firm, to develop coaching skills in managers and supervisors and to focus on enhancing hiring.

Ms. Scherling asked how employee hiring has changed since beginning work with Sagency. Mr. Ammerman said a greater focus is put on the inner drive of potential employees and what type of work will bring them fulfillment.

Ms. Scherling asked if the department incorporates more flexibility into the work environment in terms of flex time, job sharing, and time off in order to retain employees. Mr. Ammerman said a multi-faceted approach has been implemented for employee retention. Groups are created on an as-needed basis for the facilitation of purposeful problem solving, which has been

widely received as employees feel involved and informed. Supervisors also make a concerted effort to be supportive of employees' family lives and the need for work/life balance. Options are being looked at to provide some services outside of the normal 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. workday for the benefit of employees and clients. Supervisors are also being taught how to be better coaches to their staff to facilitate skills development, which has been proven to keep employees more engaged than higher salaries.

Ms. Scherling asked how long it takes to train in new staff members. Mr. Ammerman said a new Economic Assistance worker is typically capable of doing work after about six months and independent work is performed about one year after beginning employment. Social Workers have specialized education and 2-3 years' prior experience before being hired. They are typically assigned cases 2-3 weeks after beginning employment; the agency is working on developing improved onboarding practices and more formalized training.

Mr. Ammerman said approximately 50% of agency leadership has retired over the past 3 years. This has created an opportunity for a new group of managers to learn, train, and grow together.

IV. IT Projects and Visitation Room Technology

Mr. Ammerman said Mr. Schmaltz communicated with department heads that the number of IT-related projects across the county is too high and projects for 2018 need to be prioritized. Mr. Ammerman will provide Mr. Schmaltz with an order of prioritization for the department's projects.

Mr. Ammerman said a top priority for the agency at this time that will be on the next commission agenda is the replacement of audio and video equipment in the visitation room. The current equipment is extremely unreliable and only works sporadically for short and unknown periods of time.

Computers also need to be replaced for 41 staff members this year as part of the regular four-year replacement rotation.

Ms. Scherling asked if Mr. Schmaltz is able to formulate projections for the number of staff hours required to complete projects requested by departments. Mr. Schmaltz said yes; however, projects often face delays and unforeseen issues that extend the actual time required for completion.

Mr. Ammerman said while technology-related changes are sometimes difficult for staff members, they are also functional, necessary, and effective and they ultimately increase productivity.

Mr. Peterson asked if SB 2206 restricts Mr. Ammerman from hiring an IT person to serve the department. Mr. Ammerman said he does not believe the bill defines what employees can be hired for, although if the request is outside of the budget there are special procedures to define and justify expenditures.

V. Operations Report

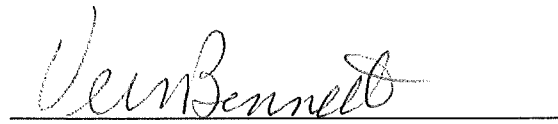
Mr. Ammerman said he would like to emphasize the Statistical Report section on the Operations Report and the rising case numbers for the Family Services Division. Despite the desire to keep

numbers down, the volume of drug-related cases continues to rise. More state and federal funding for early intervention and prevention may be available in the future, which will help the situation.

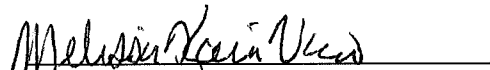
Mr. Steen made a motion to approve the Operations Report. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.

VI. Adjournment

Ms. Scherling made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:51 p.m. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.



Vern Bennett, Chair
Cass County Social Services Board



Melissa Kain Varno, Recorder