

CASS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD MEETING

January 7, 2019

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Peterson called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Present: Glenn Ellingsberg, Duane Breitling, Rick Steen, Brian Hagen, Vern Bennett, Chad Peterson

Absent: Mary Scherling

Presenter: Chip Ammerman, Director

I. **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Steen made a motion to approve the December 3, 2018 Board minutes. Mr. Ellingsberg seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Human Service Redesign Bill Introduction**

The first handout Mr. Ammerman distributed to Board members was an email from Terry Traynor, Executive Director of North Dakota Association of Counties (NDACo) expressing the position they are taking regarding the redesign, specifically how county commissioners are not in support of the timetable for consolidation, as well as the removal of local oversight of social service delivery.

The Human Service Redesign Bill will be presented at the onset of the Legislature Assembly on Monday, January 14, 2019. Mr. Ammerman explained the four areas he would like Board members to be aware of include the development of the zones, the shift of responsibilities of control, the impact the redesign has on the State's Attorney's Office, and funding. Handouts were provided from the proposed bill regarding these specific areas. Mr. Ellingsberg asked if there was any discussion about changing the terminology from "zones" to "districts" as this would be consistent with other terminology used, such as school districts. Mr. Ammerman stated this comes from the county directors, and while there have been few issues brought up regarding it, the terminology has not been discussed. Mr. Ammerman stated he would pass on the suggestion.

Zones would need to be established by September 15, 2019. If a county has 60,000 residents or more, they could be considered their own zone. Otherwise, multiple counties would combine to create a zone. Each zone would have a zone director that would oversee the service zone's operation and budget. The zone director would also have the ability to hire or impose disciplinary action on a zone team member. Zone team members will remain an employee in their respective county, however.

Decisions normally approved by the Social Service Board Member, to be known as Human Service Zone Board, would be approved by the Department of Human Services if the bill passed. The responsibilities of the zone board would include periodically reviewing services the agency provides, suggesting recommendations for improvements, as well as reviewing grievances brought forth by a zone team member. The zone board would be comprised of 15 local elected officials, state elected officials and other key community partners, as well as at least one county commissioner of that county. The zone director would serve as president of the zone board as a non-appointed member.

Mr. Ammerman stated the State Attorney's Offices would be responsible for an increased level of representation for the state, which causes concern for conflict of interests for representation. Cass County currently has three attorneys covering Cass County children in state custody.

Mr. Ammerman explained funding of the General Assistance programs would be state responsibility. The county is currently only required to provide Burial Assistance. Other programs are voluntarily if approved by the Social Service Board. The state could make changes to the way these are funded in the future. It would also allow the zone director or their designee to negotiate burial and cremation expenses with funeral homes and directors versus county commissioners.

One question asked was if it was known how much this would cost. Mr. Ammerman stated that information was unknown at this point. He was also asked if the 228 additional staff mentioned in the summary was for new staff or the transition of current staff to state employees. Mr. Ammerman stated the majority of the positions would be moving from county to state employees, but there might be some positions within that 228 that would be new staff. Mr. Ammerman stated there is a four month transition plan, but no definite timeline yet.

III. CPS Pilot Project Update

Mr. Ammerman referred the Board to the Operations Report, explaining there has been a decrease of 33 less placements since the beginning of the year. This is an amazing feat given the amount of child protection reports has increased 21%. The report increase has not impacted the amount of time Child Protection staff are closing cases, however. Approximately 40% of the cases are being closed within 30 days. It appears that when the agency engages early with families, there are better long term results and experience a decrease in recidivism. Workers report feeling like they are doing actual social work again. Mr. Ammerman also stated he has only received two calls regarding the child protection process since the last Board Meeting, compared to four or five per week prior to the Pilot Project.

He stated one item the agency is keeping track of is the Family First Prevention Services Act. This will fund foster care recruitment and retention, as well as residential treatment amongst other services. Mr. Ammerman was asked if the goal of the Pilot Project was to eliminate the need for placement of children, then why has there been such a push in the media for foster families. Mr. Ammerman explained there will always be a need for foster families, but he hopes in the future they will be used more as mentors to a family in need, if they do not have extended family supports or health family supports. PATH currently offers this; however, it requires the child to have a mental health diagnosis in order for the family to be eligible. Cass County currently has five children in a residential setting, of which they are all within the community. This is an extremely low number compared to previous years. Reports indicate significant increases in children's behaviors within our community, but those who interact with the children are learning more effective ways to address these issues within their own settings.

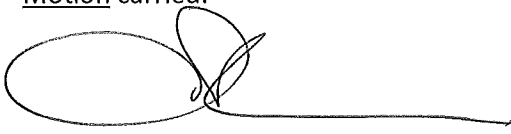
Mr. Ammerman was also happy to report that all Child Protective Services' vacant positions have been filled after being down two staff since this past summer, plus the additional position for the 2019 Budget. All three will start February 1, 2019. They are experienced social workers, and while they have not done child protection previously, they are familiar with the program and will bring much knowledge and skill to the agency.

IV. Operations Report


Economic Assistance has hired four of their vacant positions, with the new staff starting on January 22, 2019. Mr. Ammerman stated Economic Assistance is comprised of 63 staff when fully staffed. Sidney Schock, Manager of Economic Assistance, has hired 67 employees for his division since becoming manager in March 2015. Some of these replacements have been due to staff retiring, but there is an average of 12-15 staff a year that resign due to the demand of the job or change in family situation. Mr. Ammerman stated Economic Assistance continues to be stable with less than a 2% increase each month.

V. Adjournment

Mr. Breitling made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:52 p.m. Mr. Hagen seconded it. Motion carried.



Chad Peterson, Chair
Cass County Social Services Board



Melissa Kain Varno, Recorder