

## CASS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD MEETING

April 1, 2019

### MINUTES

With quorum present, Commissioner Peterson called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m.

**Present:** Chad Peterson, Glenn Ellingsberg, Brian Hagen, Vern Bennett  
**Absent:** Duane Breitling, Rick Steen, Mary Scherling  
**Presenter:** Chip Ammerman, Director; Sidney Schock, Economic Assistance Manager

#### I. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Hagen made a motion to approve the March 4, 2019 Board minutes. Mr. Ellingsberg seconded it. Motion carried.

#### II. Legislative Update

Mr. Ammerman referenced an email he sent regarding Senate Bill 2124 with updates on the Social Services' Redesign and its current amendments. He stated Child Care Licensors will become state employees, which will allow them to be more efficient in the licensing process by giving them approval authority. The licensors will remain under zonal direction and are aware of this change.

There was a question regarding the State Attorneys and who would be responsible for their cost. Mr. Ammerman explained they continue to be in his budget, but they may be removed and added to the State's expenses in the future. If they were to be removed, it would mean a reduction of approximately \$380,000 from the agency's budget. Cass and Burleigh are the only counties that currently have attorneys in their budget. There are three to four other state services where private attorneys provide legal assistance, but these services would be absorbed by the State Attorney's Office should they become State employees.

It was asked whether there would be salary or budget adjustments for staff with the approval of the redesign. It's unknown at this time what budget impacts may be on the zones; however, one area that is being reviewed is the caseload reimbursement formula which impacts funding. There will be a significant change with the reduction from 46 county directors to 19 zonal directors.

There was discussion regarding comparable pay throughout those zones and if all staff doing the same tasks would be at the same pay scale. Mr. Ammerman explained some foreseeable problems with this would be that, because of our agency's staff retention, they are at a higher level on the pay scale for county and state than other agencies. Another factor is that each agency's caseloads and experience are all at different levels. He also stated with the step increases county employees receive, the agency is within the same pay range of state positions. The State does not do step increases, which means some staff may be at a pay freeze unless a pay increase is approved. The State has talked about leveling out some of the Economic Assistance work; however, this too, would be a major challenge.

#### III. Multi-County Region

Mr. Ammerman explained Cass County will need to submit a zonal plan by December 2019, even though we are not considering creating a zone with other counties. There has been discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of creating a new zone with other counties. Chair Peterson stated he would likely oppose uniting with other counties. Mr. Ammerman stated Trail County has offered to cover some rural areas, such as Hunter and Page.

**IV. Operations Report**

January, February, and March were some of the highest months for Child Protection Services (CPS) which has been challenging for staff. Last fall, CPS was down three staff, which resulted in 15-20 cases being assigned a month to each worker for almost six months. Those vacant positions have been filled and employees are hopeful to have some reprieve June through August, when it is typically less busy due to school being out of session. Foster care caseloads continue to drop as families are being provided more options for in-home case management services.

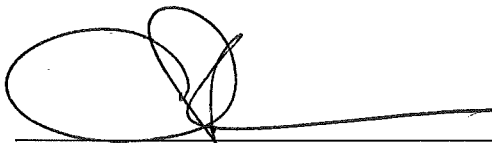
Mr. Schock stated new applications continue to be stable. Approximately 1,200 applications are received per month with 1,000 being closed. The biggest challenge recently has been the shift in systems. Economic Assistance staff have started transitioning to the newest release of SPACES, which is a program used to determine eligibility of financial assistance programs. There were some mainframe issues initially, but he states they are getting better. The biggest challenge will be the conversion of cases. In the first release of SPACES, there was a data drop that eliminated the need to convert cases. Not having the ability to do this with the newest release increases an Eligibility Worker's time to process an application by up to four hours. The worker not only has to determine current eligibility for the review, but they must also convert all programs the client receives. Due to the time this takes, Mr. Schock has had discussion with Michelle Gee about allowing workers continued use of the Legacy systems in order to reduce the processing times to approximately 20 minutes. He stated in the one and a half weeks since its release, Economic Assistance staff have converted approximately 300 cases.

There was a question as to why the number of electronic applications has such a significant increase in the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter. Mr. Schock explained that is the time of ACA open enrollment which creates a large fluctuation each year at the same time.

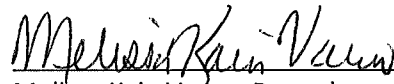
Mr. Ellingsberg requested that numbers be placed on the line items of the Operations Report so it can be easily referenced in discussion. Mr. Ammerman stated they would do so.

**V. Adjournment**

Mr. Hagen made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:53 p.m. Mr. Ellingsberg seconded it. Meeting adjourned.



Chad Peterson, Chair  
Cass County Social Services Board

  
Melissa Kain Varno, Recorder