

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

April 6, 2020

MINUTES

With quorum present, Director Ferguson called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

Present: Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Brian Hagen, Rick Steen, Glenn Ellingsberg, Ken Pawluk, Duane Breitling (all present via Skype teleconference)

Absent:

Presenter: Pearl Ferguson, Human Services Zone Director; Robert Wilson, County Administrator

I. **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Pawluk made a motion to approve the February 3, 2020 and February 18, 2020 Board minutes. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Review of CCSS Report Recommendations**

Robert Wilson, County Administrator, explained that on February 13, 2020, Rick Van Camp, Child Protection Supervisor, and Linda Dorff, Family Services Manager, were presented with Pre-Action letters based upon reports from the Cass County Sheriff's Office of Professional Standards and Center for Mediation and Consultation Attorney-at-Law Patricia Monson. The letters outlined five actions considered by the Board. Both Mr. Van Camp and Ms. Dorff were given until March 9, 2020 to provide responses to the Pre-Action letters, of which they did. A meeting was scheduled to address the matters on March 16, 2020; however, that meeting was cancelled due to precautions being taken for COVID-19.

Mr. Wilson clarified Director Ferguson ultimately makes the final decision in the matter as current permanent Zone Director. The Board is able to make recommendations to Director Ferguson for her consideration. Mr. Wilson then deferred to Director Ferguson for explanation of her recommendations and decision.

Director Ferguson first shared her preference and recommendation then allowed suggestions and recommendations from Board members. After her review of the documentation provided including Officer Stading's report, Pre-Action letters and interaction she has had with Mr. Van Camp and Ms. Dorff since employed with Cass County Human Service Zone, it is Director Ferguson's preference that Mr. Van Camp and Ms. Dorff be placed on a structured, goal-oriented Work Performance Improvement Plan (WPIP) while remaining in their current positions. The plans would be developed by Director Ferguson with assistance from Human Resource personnel, Ms. Dorff, and Mr. Van Camp. The expectations would be to see marked improvement and long-term maintenance in areas of communication, leadership, staff relationships, trust, and other elements as they arise. Failure to meet the goals would result in disciplinary action up to termination. Successful completion could result in periodic performance assessments outside of, but not excluding, the annual performance review. It is Director Ferguson's plan to take the information she was provided (investigational reports, files, letters and other documents) in conjunction with her own observations and experiences to develop meaningful action plans that will enhance the quality of leadership and the culture of Cass County Human Service Zone.

Director Ferguson then opened up discussion to the Board members for any questions, comments, and suggestions they would have for her.

Mr. Hagen stated he supports Director Ferguson's decision but questions how the staff and other employees can be sure these issues have been corrected. He inquired if there would be quarterly interviews or surveys. Director Ferguson explained there will be objective measures to

ensure the plans are working correctly and she would be in support of doing that on a quarterly basis by soliciting input from staff. She explains it should not just be her perception of change, but staff's perception as well. Mr. Hagen feels this feedback should be part of the WPIP, of which Director Ferguson agreed.

Mr. Breitling questioned if marked improvement appears to be lacking, will termination be automatic or would the Director report back to the Zone Board for advisement. Director Ferguson felt it would be her responsibility to bring it back to the Zone Board for discussion and advisement. Mr. Wilson added that Director Ferguson would work with County and State Human Resources, but Director Ferguson would have the authority to make staffing decisions if need be.

Mr. Steen stated he would be more comfortable if monitoring was done on a more on-going basis and that if Director Ferguson found something was not going well, she should take action or work with the individual involved to identify what needs to be accomplished. Mr. Steen is not comfortable waiting to address quarterly. He also questioned the two higher level positions that were open, and then temporarily closed in the event they be offered to Mr. Van Camp and Ms. Dorff. He stated that if the Board supports Director Ferguson's recommendations, those positions should be relisted as soon as possible in order to fill the needed positions quickly.

Director Ferguson stated she appreciated Mr. Steen's recommendations and agreed that some systematic monitoring could be done on a routine basis and feels that by engaging with staff on a regular basis, she will have a better understanding of what is going on as well. She also confirmed the positions were temporarily put on hold as potential options for Mr. Van Camp and Ms. Dorff. If they agree with her recommendations, Director Ferguson would then contact State Human Resources to reopen those positions and continue the recruiting process in order to fill them as soon as possible. Mr. Steen questioned if it would be appropriate to offer Mr. Van Camp and Ms. Dorff the option to one of those open positions now, with the understanding they would still be under a WPIP. Director Ferguson stated that could be considered as an option but would still stand firm that there would still be some element of performance improvement as they will still be engaging with team members. Mr. Steen did not disagree and stated that would be his intention as well.

Mr. Breitling felt that making the offer Mr. Steen suggested would be appropriate as long as they were aware they would still be subject to the improvement plan.

Ms. Scherling questioned the role of County Human Resources and how they are engaged in the process versus the role of State Human Resources. Mr. Wilson explained they have work very closely with County and State Human Resources since January 1, 2020. While he cannot outline the coordination between these two offices, he stated they work very closely so each are aligned. Ms. Scherling feels it is very important that the County Human Resources is engaged with this department. Mr. Wilson assured Ms. Scherling that those communications are frequent and ongoing. Director Ferguson also agrees and supports this engagement to ensure the obligations to the Merit System are followed along with the County policies. Ms. Scherling stressed the importance of this Board and Cass County Human Resources being notified of any situations or issues that do occur. Director Ferguson stated her continued goal is to bridge the gap between the County and State and ensure she is representing both agencies appropriately.

As portfolio chair, Mr. Steen assured that in all the emails he has been involved in with the State regarding personnel issues, Cindy Stoick, Cass County Human Resource Director, has also been included on those emails and has been involved in the process.

Mr. Peterson questioned what Director Ferguson felt has been accomplished thus far and if a survey were conducted, would the outcome be different. Director Ferguson asked for

clarification on Mr. Peterson's first question. He clarified by stating with everything that has occurred in the last year and all the efforts made, what did Director Ferguson feel has been accomplished. Director Ferguson stated there has been much time and effort put into investigating the concerns, but she does not feel that outside of investigating, there have been any meaningful actions taking place. She stated that ended today and hoped they see the idea of a WPIP as a next step. She sees and acknowledges the concerns from the reports and she will not condone nor tolerate that kind of behavior. Her recommended action will take time, but it will be done in a way she feels comfortable and confident that she is doing the right thing for staff and clients of Cass County Human Service Zone. Mr. Peterson then reiterated his question as to whether the surveys would have different results than they did before. Director Ferguson was honest in reporting she was not sure she could answer that. In her experience when surveying people, they are asked to consider a period of time, while in reality, they highlight the major things that have happened or are currently happening. She does not feel that at this time she is able to provide an accurate answer to that question.

Mr. Steen responded to Mr. Peterson's question regarding what has been accomplished stating he felt the major accomplishment was the hiring of a new Zone Director since there was feeling that issues emanated at the top of the agency. Mr. Steen feels Director Ferguson should be given the time to make her decision based on her experiences and then be able to make the appropriate recommendations as needed.

Mr. Pawluk stated Director Ferguson's recommendation is what he would have recommended as well and feels that it is the right decision.

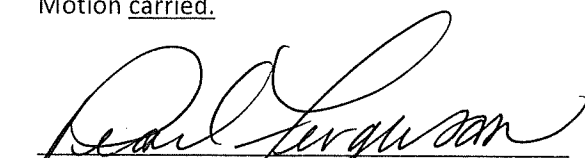
Mr. Pawluk made a motion to follow the recommendations of Cass County Human Service Zone Director Pearl Ferguson placing Rick Van Camp and Linda Dorff on a Work Performance Improvement Plan while maintaining their current positions. Mr. Steen seconded. On roll call, motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Wilson acknowledged Director Ferguson and her first three weeks in her role. Her first day was the Declaration for State of Emergency due to COVID-19. He is impressed with her transition into the role and looks forward to continuing to work with her within her position.


Mr. Steen asked Director Ferguson to address the Board and briefly provide insight to her first three weeks. She stated they have been very interesting due to COVID-19 and not what she had anticipated for a normal onboarding process. Despite this, everyone has been very welcoming and willing to answer her questions, teach her, and have patience with her while she learns the work. She has witnessed staff going above and beyond what it takes to ensure clients in the community are being served. She explains she has been happy to come to work and is excited for what the future holds. She is very optimistic about what is happening and hopes she can bring that to light and foster what already exist, such as hard work and positiveness.

III. **Adjournment**

Mr. Breitling made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:45 p.m. Ms. Scherling seconded. Motion carried.



Pearl Ferguson, Zone Director
Cass County Human Services Zone Board



Blair Hodge, Recorder