

CASS COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE ZONE BOARD MEETING

April 4, 2022

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Bollinger called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Duane Breitling; Commissioner Rick Steen (via Teams); Carey Fry; Brian Hagen; Julie Haugen; Michelle Kommer; Dan Madler (via Teams); Gail Bollinger

Absent:

Presenter: Gail Bollinger, Zone Director; Heather Collins, Executive Staff Officer; Jill Lane, Economic Assistance Supervisor; Shaina Huovinen, Economic Assistance Supervisor; Diane Jorgenson, Economic Assistance Supervisor

I. **Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Breitling made a motion to approve the March 7, 2022, Board minutes. Ms. Haugen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. **Featured Program: Economic Assistance**

Jill Lane, Shaina Huovinen, and Diane Jorgenson, Economic Assistance Supervisors shared an overview of the programs available through Economic Assistance. Between the three supervisors present today, there are over 63 years of experience delivering services to Cass County residents.

Application packets were provided to members that were present. Individuals can apply using the packets or the Self-Service Portal online. The number of online applications continues to increase compared to previous years. Board members requested statistics for this, of which will be sent after the meeting.

Ms. Lane explained each program involves different criteria for eligibility and requires individuals to report their income, assets, and expenses for determination. Individuals can apply for all programs (Medicaid, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP – nee Food Stamps), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Child Care Assistance) or individual programs.

Economic Assistance receives approximately 1,100 applications per month. When an individual applies for services, a screener reviews the application and assigns it to an Eligibility Worker via a rotation log. Once assigned, that worker would retain the case for its lifetime. Due to the State redesign, this process will be changing to a Process Management Workflow. Set to begin in March 2022, it has been rescheduled for an undetermined date in 2023 due to ongoing discussions on the process as well as software issues. Next week, the division will begin with some workflow changes to allow staff to become familiar with the process management workflow. Chair Bollinger explained the benefits of the change include case equity for staff, clients receiving their benefits quicker, and staff not requiring coverage while on leave.

It was asked if individuals can walk in and apply and be seen by a worker immediately. The supervisors explained that individuals can come in to pick up applications at any

time; however, they will not necessarily get an appointment to be seen. Board members inquired how cases are counted if the client is in multiple services. In the past it would result in a duplicated case in the statistics. Ms. Jorgenson explained it is difficult to count the number of cases; however, there is a report that Chair Bollinger is working on obtaining.

Under the Economic Assistance Redesign, Cass County will merge with other Zones in the area to form a service region. The map of the regions will be provided to the Board members. Each region will be responsible for covering applications coming from the Zones within that area. Eventually, there will be a Central Call Center and a Central Mail Center to handle all calls and correspondence coming and going. Concerns were raised regarding how other Zones will be able to offer services to clients if they are not familiar with our area. Discussions continue regarding this issue. There are other Zones currently assisting Cass County with applications and will provide clients with FirstLink 2-1-1 or they will contact staff here with questions about resources and services.

Board members questioned if everyone in the State could be trained on the process but still have some that are more specialized on certain tasks. There have been numerous discussions on this, but it was ultimately decided the only program that would continue to be specialized is TANF, due to the nature of the program and how it has the least number of cases. The goal of Process Management is to create a balance in workload whereas specialization creates an imbalance.

With the current Public Health Emergency, health care cases have not been closed for the last two years unless a client moves out of state or requests their case closed. It is estimated Cass County has over 13,000 cases currently open. Once the directive ends, there will be many clients not eligible, which will return case numbers to pre-pandemic statistics. Each case will go through a review and if the review is not returned or determined ineligible, the case will be closed. The division has seen an increase in Child Care Assistance due to income requirements being increased and more families becoming eligible. Families do still have difficulty locating daycares, however. Based on federal guidelines, turnaround time on applications vary between 30-45 days depending on the program. It does not always take that long, but that is what Eligibility Workers are allowed.

Board members questioned what the increase was regarding Child Care Assistance. The supervisors explained there is a sliding fee scale used to determine. There is also no co-pay required. This will continue until February 2023. It was requested that the sliding fee information be sent to Board members for review.

Chair Bollinger expressed her appreciation to the supervisors and the Economic Assistance staff as they continue to navigate through the many complex programs and changes occurring.

III. Personnel Update

Heather Collins, Executive Staff Officer, reported 22 positions in various hiring stages. There were an increased resignations in the last month with approximately eight staff leaving for State positions. Similar moves have impacted many Zones across the State.

While the pay scale stays the same between Zone and State employees, the benefit package is much different creating more out-of-pocket expense for State employees.

It was questioned if staff completed exit interviews after their resignation notice. Ms. Collins stated Cindy Stoick, County Human Resource Director, conducts these; however, Ms. Collins does not have statistical data from the exit interviews, rather Administration is able to read the comments and share accordingly.

Ms. Fry inquired what is being used to recruit individuals to apply. Ms. Collins reported currently relying on the State for position advertisement and Chair Bollinger has shared some positions with her networking groups. Ms. Fry informed the Zone Board of a Nationwide Online Job Fair and stated she would forward on the information to Ms. Collins and Chair Bollinger. It was asked if positions are still being underfilled and if that meant the individual would start off at a lower wage. Ms. Collins reported that yes, underfilling does still occur, but it does not necessarily mean a lower wage.

IV. Director's Report

The Zone Plan submitted to Department of Human Services at the beginning of March has been approved and filed.

On March 17, 2022, Chair Bollinger held an All-Zone Meeting with an in-person session in the morning and a virtual session via Teams in the afternoon. Information Technology (IT) Director Bob Henderson provided information from his department and how he can assist our agency. Chair Bollinger provided an overview on her values and visions for the agency. Recognition was given to staff who reached service milestones in 2020 and 2021.

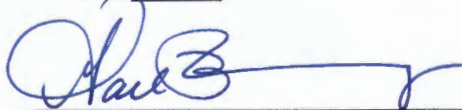
Kim Jacobson, Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director, and Lynn Flieth, RSR Human Service Zone Director, continue to engage with Cass County Human Service Zone but their onsite presence has decreased.

Chair Bollinger continues to proceed with her Zone Director Orientation program and reported attending partner meetings with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), North Dakota Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, and individual Zone Board members.

It was questioned if any action has been taken regarding the Commission-approved space arrangement for the Annex Building. Chair Bollinger reported a draft has been provided to Robert Wilson, County Administrator, but the initial meeting was rescheduled to two weeks from now.

V. Adjournment

Ms. Fry made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:55 p.m. Ms. Haugen seconded. Motion carried.



Gail Bollinger, Zone Director
Cass County Human Service Zone



Blair Hodge, Recorder