

Baltimore County Department of Social Services Board Minutes

The meeting of the Advisory Board of the Baltimore County Department of Social Services (DSS) was held March 18, 2024, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. via Google Meet.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lisa Simon Jablon, Dr. Donald Gabriel, Tim Butka, David English, Jasmine Leigh Morse, Elder Joseph Sanders.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Stefanie A. Bronson, Melanie Gordon-Newell, Morgan Phillips

OTHERS PRESENT: Mark Millspaugh; Deputy Director and Kathy Wynn, Executive Secretary to the Director.

I. Reading and Approval of the Minutes:

Motion: To approve the minutes of February 12, 2024

Motion by: Dr. Gabriel

Second by: Mr. Butka

Decision: Unanimous Approval

Ms. Jablon informed board members at 4:45 p.m. the Board will go into executive session. Mr. Millspaugh will then leave the meeting. Elisabeth Sachs, Deputy Administrative Officer for Health and Community Services, which includes Health and Human Services, will have a presentation. After the presentation, board members will have an opportunity for Q&A. The meeting will then adjourn.

II. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)

During COVID, the federal government allocated funds to support people who were struggling to pay their water bills. Baltimore County received an allocation of that funding to provide direct payments for LIHWAP. The program, which has been in effect for two and half years, will sunset effective March 30. This program has assisted 846 families to cover water arrearages with an average grant award of \$820.00 per family. Funding for this program was tied to COVID funds for people who were out of work when the shutdown occurred.

This program highlights an ongoing need in the community. Water bills are not covered by any other energy or public assistance program. There has been some discussion at the federal level to include with energy assistance programs.

Foster Youth/Luggage Need

A Maryland state delegate proposed legislation that would have required local DSS departments to provide luggage to children who are removed from their home. Secretary Lopez met with the legislator and informed this was already department practice.

After the Secretary met with the Delegate, who expressed a willingness to withdraw the bill, an advocate took a picture posted in *The Washington Post* of a child being transported using a trash bag for their belongings. DSS provides luggage for youth. Where we struggle is when transport is happening outside of our jurisdiction. The youth that was in the photo was in runaway status ended up in a homeless shelter, had an altercation at the homeless shelter and reached out to someone who had been an interpreter. That individual picked the youth up. They went to the shelter, packed up his belongings and took him to a hotel. DSS was not involved. We can't control when a youth is transported from a homeless shelter or vendor.

The department has a supply of luggage but not a large storage room to store. The luggage supply is refilled on a quarterly basis purchasing smaller duffel bags. It would be nice to have large duffel bags at our disposal. We are looking at placing in the trunks of all our state cars as we don't always know when we will need to pick up children.

Budget funds are not allocated for luggage. Often, we wait until the end of the fiscal year to purchase. We tend to purchase duffel bags rather than suitcases, as they take less space. Are there charitable organizations or sewing guilds who may be interested in supporting youth in foster care? The county charter restricts the board from directly soliciting or gifts. If approached, board members may inform of the need and help individuals/organizations to understand the process. Donations less than \$5K can be accepted. Mr. Millspaugh would submit a 14-day letter to the County Council informing them of the donation. The County Council then decides if they want to schedule a hearing regarding the donation. Mr. Millspaugh will send a document to board members that summarizes this information, and appropriate process regarding donations. Mr. Millspaugh to check with the county ethics commission regarding donations.

District Office Audits

Secretary Lopez is very focused on improving customer service and the perception of customer service. He has asked one of his special assistants to visit every district office in the state of Maryland to conduct an audit of the front desk and waiting areas. Those audits have started. Audits are a structured process, this special assistant has a questionnaire to complete at each visit rating on a scale of one to five such items as parking, is the office accessible by public transportation, is there certain signage in the lobby, how staff interact with clients, are there drop boxes outside of the building and how an office checks clients in whether electronic or via paper.

After the visit, the office has five days to respond to a series of questions. Mr. Millspaugh will be watching this process closely. Board members are welcome to visit an office, observe interactions and provide feedback to Mr. Millspaugh. Feedback from this audit will be shared with board members.

III. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Jablon inquired if the landlord has posted bollards at the Reisterstown district office since the car came through the glass? Mr. Millspaugh responded they have not yet been installed; the landlord is working with the State.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

None.

V. REMARKS OF THE CHAIRPERSON

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for April 15. Ms. Jablon is not available to attend the April board meeting. Mr. Butka will preside as Chair. Board member consensus was to keep this meeting virtual.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 5:02PM

Decision: Unanimous Approval



Mark Millspaugh