

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 April 15, 2024, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. via Google Meet.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Stefanie A. Bronson, Tim Butka, David English, Dr. Donald Gabriel

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lisa Simon Jablon, Jasmine Leigh Morse, Melanie Gordon-Newell, Morgan Phillips, Elder Joseph Sanders

OTHERS PRESENT: Mark Millspaugh; Deputy Director, Diane Richards; Administrator, Homeless Shelters and Kathy Wynn, Executive Secretary to the Director.

I. Reading and Approval of the Minutes:

Motion: To approve the minutes of March 18, 2024
Minutes to be approved at the May 20 meeting.

II. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The FY25 budget was submitted by the County Executive to the county council on Thursday last week. The budget is now available on the website including the County Executive's remarks.

The department received an increase, enough to absorb salary increases that went into effect COLAs and a few inflationary adjustments for some of our programs.

There was one specific area we struggled with determining how to fund; a program that has existed for many years and is required by HUD. It is called Coordinated Entry, which is the single point of entry for any homelessness prevention, housing instability and sheltering calls. HUD requires us to have a system to allow people to contact us. We screen those call based on information being provided using what is called a vulnerability index to determine where they fall in the prioritization for limited resources. DSS has performed this function for many years but in a limited capacity. In the past, it has been done by the Adult Protective services team and only focused on intake to shelters. It was decided a few years back to make Coordinated Entry a robust service for people in the community, consistent with broad HUD guidelines for best practice. Housing instability is a significant challenge in Baltimore County. During the COVID years, the County established more eviction prevention programs and has also expanded Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing.

DSS is the operator of this Coordinated Entry program, though it is a HUD required initiative that falls under the Continuum of Care under the Department of Housing and Community Development. They are not a direct service provider so DSS delivers the services.

Individuals may call the telephone hotline, 410-887-TIME(8463) for general resource information. If unsheltered, we can screen them for possible shelter placement. Calls are also received regarding eviction notices or they are worried about their housing situation. Depending upon the level of need, different staff may address as there can be some level of telephonic case management.

Coordinated Entry was built up during COVID out of a temporary funding stream. It was hoped that there would be grant opportunities that would fill the gaps. We applied for a number of grants. Unfortunately, many of those grants did not come to fruition. However, we have been successful in developing a plan to get through FY25. There is funding for the entire year. The second half of the fiscal year, other temporary funding will be used. Mr. Millspaugh also had to decide what a reasonable staffing component for this program should be. We are reducing the team going from 14 people to eight as we are not doing all the eviction assistance work that was done during the COVID Public Health Emergency. The ERAP program has largely ended. Mr. Millspaugh had to make some decisions around where he could find positions within the budget in other program areas and re-prioritize all vacancies to absorb some of these grant-funded staff.

We will have another year to monitor the call volume. We were receiving almost 2,000 calls per month coming into the hotline. Many were people seeking eviction assistance, which has now decreased. The most recent three months of data show calls are down to 1100 per month. We will continue to monitor and may downsize again dependent upon the number of calls and the workload.

The good news is the program is significantly more robust than pre-COVID. The budget supports this program through FY25.

This is the county budget. The Council will now hold hearings. After they hold their hearings, they may decide to move funds. They cannot add to the budget but they may make recommendations to move or cut funds. Once the Council approves the budget, it will go to the County Executive for signature. Mr. Millspaugh will provide a more detailed briefing at a future meeting once he receives the final details.

On the state side, there was an effort by many in the Legislature to tackle a structural deficit they see impacting a little this year and much more in future years. The Governor and many in the Legislature did not support doing so this year. Legislation regarding raising revenue did not happen.

Freezing Weather Shelter (FWS)

Ms. Richards provided an overview of the FWS.

Ms. Richards directly oversees the vendors who deliver shelter services at Eastern Family Resource Center (EFRC), the Westside Men's Shelter and the Hannah Moore Shelter. In addition to overseeing vendor contracts, Ms. Richards is involved in helping to manage facility issues. She also does a lot of work to make sure we have an escalation process for shelter residents to address complaints. Ms. Richards also monitors the child care program operated by YMCA that is housed at EFRC on the first floor.

Ms. Richards reported we are at the end of Freezing Weather Shelter (FWS) season. For FY24, the FWS started November 19 and ends today. The County partnered with Streets of Hope to operate the Woodlawn shelter. The Community Assistance Network (CAN) operated the east side location.

The goal of the FWS is to avoid hypothermic exposures/deaths and not to create barriers for homeless individuals. Protocols for opening the shelter: temperature has to be 32° or lower or a

high wind chill factor. The FWS opens at 6PM and closes at 9AM and provides a hot dinner and breakfast. In January, the FWS was open seven consecutive days around the clock. When that happens, individuals are provided with breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Butler Security is at both FWS sites. There is also a cleaning company that cleans the shelters after each activation. Families, children and single adults stay at the shelters. For their protection, security will do a thorough search prior to them entering the facility. There are lockers for individuals to place their items. When they leave, they take those items with them.

The EFRC shelter has hot rooms that reach 280°. All items are placed in a hot room prior to entering the shelter.

FY 24 Statistics:

FWS were open a total of 83 nights from 6PM to 9AM with the exception of the seven days in January where shelters were open 24\7.

Total bednights (both east and west side locations): 2,278 (1545 eastside, 733 west side) (1,369 men/756 women/153 children). For families at the FWS, Ms. Richardson asks the staff to try and get those families into regular shelters as soon as possible.

Number of individuals first time at the FWS: 547
418 single individuals
64 Families (15 of which went to a regular shelter after FWS)
23 People Ages 18-24
208 People Ages 25-54
144 Seniors

At time of entry there were:

23 veterans (It is important to know this number. Veterans can get VASH vouchers and there are other services available for them)
62 who reported domestic violence
54 chronically homeless
150 with physical disability and/or chronic health conditions
190 reported mental health issues which include substance use disorder, alcohol or drugs
219 reported no income at all

Items of note in comparing the data from FY23/FY24:

In FY23, the FWS was open 82 nights, in FY24 82 nights; however, in FY23 we served 241 individuals as opposed to 547 individuals in FY24. There is definitely an enormous need for FWS in Baltimore County.

Baltimore County provides meals for the westside Woodlawn Shelter. Meals for the east side shelter are included in the shelter contract and provided by CAN.

For FY23 at Woodlawn, 1,920 meals were served. For FY24, 3,460 meals were served.

Ms. Richards is proud of the staff who worked at the FWS, where the numbers increased significantly over FY23.

Next year, Ms. Richards wants to do a survey after each activation to see where individuals who stay at the FWS come from. FWS staff state they come from hospitals, dropped off by police, nursing home discharges and correctional facilities. We do receive a great number of hospital drop offs. Ms. Richard's goal this year, along with the CoC, is to coordinate a meeting with hospital social workers.

Mr. Millspaugh stated this is the first year we have used the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to capture data for FWS. Some of this increase is somewhat of a data anomaly issue. What we have found in the past is that a stand-alone shelter attracts more people than trying to get them to go to an existing shelter. Also, in Baltimore County the location of those existing shelters isn't necessarily where the homeless population is, they are not easy to get to.

This year, we built up capacity at EFRC in a more thoughtful way. We served more people through EFRC than at the stand-alone west side FWS location.

We are in middle of doing an RFP for regular shelters for all of our sites (EFRC, Hannah Moore and Westside). The RFP was drafted with an eye toward changing demographics. Built into the RFP was the expectation that each of the regular shelters have a certain number of beds opened up for FWS needs. Also, a separate request for anyone who wants to bid on being an operator for a stand-alone FWS shelter. Our goal is to have this institutionalized into one master agreement. The contract will be for five years.

III. OLD BUSINESS

Reminder that financial disclosures are due the end of this month

IV. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Millspaugh asked the board what topics they would be interested in for upcoming meetings?
Dr. Gabriel mentioned benefit theft.

V. REMARKS OF THE CHAIRPERSON

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for May 20.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 5:15PM

Motion by: Mr. English

Second by: Ms. Bronson

Decision: Unanimous Approval



Mark Millspaugh
Director