

The Accomack County Board of Social Services met at its facility on Tuesday, October 19, 2021, at 9:30 A.M. Present in person were Ms. Reneta Major, Chairman; Mrs. Elsie B. Mackie, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Robert D. Crockett; Mr. Robert Martin; Mr. David Whalen; Mr. Jackie H. Phillips; and Mrs. Vicki J. Weakley, Secretary.

Ms. Major called the meeting to order and welcomed the Board Members. Ms. Mackie gave the Invocation.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 3 - Approve Minutes of September 21, 2021**. On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Crockett, the Minutes were approved as written. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 4 – Fraud Report**. Mr. Crockett asked Mrs. Weakley compared to reports we received before Mrs. Bailey became the investigator, how is everything stacking up now removing COVID from the equation. Mrs. Weakley responded that, right now, because of COVID, we are not doing as many. Part of that is because the State temporarily did away with face-to-face interviews. Staff are not noticing things that are inconsistent or do not make sense the way they use to; therefore, they are not making as many referrals as they were prior to COVID. Mrs. Weakley stated that she believes that will pick back up when we return to something that resembles normal. Mr. Crockett requested that when we do return to something normal that Mrs. Weakley compare now to back then because he would like to measure everything. No other questions or concerns were raised.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 5 – Director’s Notes**. Mrs. Weakley stated that, since the last Board meeting, she attended a Two Gen State meeting (Two Gen stands for two generations and it is the State’s version of what we are doing with the Poverty Work Group. It is unclear what the differences are between the two. Two Gen is in the asking questions phase now.); the Fatality Review Team; Interviews (we have conducted interviews for the Office Associate positions. So far, there has been no success.); Healthy Communities Report Out Retreat; CPMT (Community Policy and Management Team); VALSO (Virginia Alliance of Local Human Services Officials); VLSSE (Virginia League of Social Services Executive’s Board); and the Regional Director’s Meeting on timeliness and CPS response (in terms of the State dialog, as you are aware, the State has gone to the new Families First Program for Prevention and at the same time they changed how they fund residential treatment facilities for children particularly that are in foster care. They now have what’s called the QRTP (Qualified Residential Treatment Facility). Agencies had to go through a rigorous process and get a special license to continue to receive funding. We are not allowed to use any facility that doesn’t go through that process. At the same time, Medicaid started covering a lot of the psychiatric facilities or the mental health related facilities with the exception of the educational piece. In reviewing their funding they discovered that many of those facilities were charging the maximum that Medicaid would allow even though it was not costing that amount. For example: If the facilities rate was \$20.00, but Medicaid would pay \$50.00, the facilities were charging Medicaid for \$50.00. Mr. Crockett asked, isn’t that fraud? Mrs. Weakley responded that she did not actually hear those words; however, Medicaid told the facilities this would no longer happen and the facilities in turn have been releasing children from the facilities based on they can no longer keep the children for that amount of money. This was a direct violation of the contract that Medicaid has with the facilities and that we have with Medicaid. There is legal action pending. In the meantime, facilities are refusing to accept any of our children. Some localities in Virginia have had to have staff in the building 24 hours a day because they have no placement for the children coming into care. Obviously, staff are not allowed to take the children home with them. Many of the larger localities like northern Virginia are having a bigger problem with this. Our agency has not had this issue yet nor has Northampton County. Medicaid and the State are trying to figure out solutions. Some facilities decided to charge an additional fee to make up the difference and that is illegal. If we know this is happening, we have to report it to the State and they will handle it. Right now, we do not have any children in residential facilities so it is not affect us. Many children coming into custody across the State have more emotional problems than in the past. If we were to receive one of those children into custody, we may run into some of the same difficulties in terms of finding a placement for them.

We have previously discussed the statistics that the State sends out and we are showing some difficulty in areas. An application for benefits can come into this office four ways. They can come in person, over the phone, through CommonHelp which is an online service (CommonHelp does the initial screening and approval of the application, but they have the ability to transfer the application before they are actually completed), the Federal Marketplace (if the Federal Marketplace determines that they are Medicaid eligible, then the application is sent to us). We have 45 days to process an application. CPU has transferred cases to us at 60 – 120 days after the application was completed. Therefore, the minute we get it, it's already overdue. Ms. Major asked if this then falls on us. Mrs. Weakley responded that yes, it falls on this agency. The State states that, once the case has been transferred to us, they have no way of knowing that these cases were not ours from the beginning and cannot separate the statistics. Every time we get the statistics it appears that we are completely out of compliance with timeliness of Medicaid applications, but we are not. According to the State, there is no way for us to defend ourselves. CommonHelp is on a performance improvement plan and is supposed to have this fixed by the end of November. Mr. Crockett suggested that each time the report comes out that a memo be attached to it indicating what Mrs. Weakley just stated. This way you at least have it documented. Ms. Major concurred. Mrs. Weakley stated that on the statistics report it states timeliness of CommonHelp, timeliness of FFA, and timeliness of online applications. In addition, in terms of Medicaid timeliness, the State has mentioned they are going to do some training to get everyone on board. Cases that are pregnancy Medicaid have a delay indicator that people are supposed to be checking, but apparently the State forgot to tell clients; therefore, a lot of the Medicaid applications are showing up overdue and, in actuality, they are not because the worker didn't check that box. We are in the process of getting that resolved.

Another problem happening across the State as well as here is public guardianships. We have the ability to take guardianship of an elderly person who is deemed incompetent if there is not an appropriate family member or person that is able. The State discourages us to take guardianship unless we have no other alternative. We will take temporary guardianship and the person is then placed on the list for public guardianship. Our public guardianships are with Jewish Family Services or Catholic Charities. We have discovered the public guardianships are willing to take the easy cases, but anything that is more difficult, they always find a way to put them further down on the list. Every time the client reaches the top of the list the facility finds a way to put them further down again. As this continues, we have to pay a fee to pay up until the point they are accepted. The fee is usually \$2,000 - \$3,000 a year. This agency only receives \$7,500.00 a year to cover in-home companion services and emergency needs. Presently, we have two of those and it drains our budget. The State is trying to work on this issue through the Department of Rehabilitation who oversees the adult services program that we run.

Adult Protective Services is seeing a rise in romantic schemes for exploiting adults. Before, the rise was in financial exploitation.

CSA (the Children's Services Act) monetary requests have dropped significantly during COVID mostly because children were not coming to the attention of professionals so referrals were not being made. This has caused concern for CSA and they have stated that underperforming agencies will be referred to a committee for review. A definition has not been provided of what an underperforming agency might look like. Mrs. Weakley stated she is bracing for them to review our program because of this. Ms. Major inquired what would be the worst that could happen. Mrs. Weakley stated that it was not made clear. CSA has stated, up to this point, that even though our spending this past year was significantly lower than previously, they were not making any changes to our budget. A reduction to our budget would be the worst thing that could happen. So far, in the 5 years that I have been employed here, we have managed to cover every expense in the fiscal year without having to request additional funding. If the State were to cut our funding, even by a little bit, it probably would not have a negative impact on this agency. Even if they were to review our program, they would see that we have done a significant amount of informational ways to make the public aware that the funding is available and the process of accessing it. We have not turned a single case down in the last year. CSA is more than likely putting us on notice. Ms. Major inquired when the review would take

place. Mrs. Weakley stated that the State has not given any timelines. We are due for a review by CSA in January 2022. We are preparing for that now and making sure all of our records are in order. Normally, they would come in person, but just like everything else right now, it will be done electronically. This will be our first CSA review since hiring our CSA Coordinator, Rudy Zavala. Mr. Zavala has all the records there should not be an issue with the review.

The State is planning to redo our hiring system. They have gone from what would be viewed as a traditional application to resumes only, which has created all kinds of issues. Mr. Crockett stated that resumes would certainly make your interview process longer because of all the gaps you will have to fill in from a traditional application along with the process of verifying the answers to questions to see if they are accurate. Mrs. Weakley agreed. Mrs. Weakley stated that if you only have a resume, it removes the screening process completely. There have been a lot of complaints across the State. Supposedly, they are creating a new system that is to start in December 2021. Mrs. Mackie stated that there is a possibility that a younger generation has been hired for this project because they like to do resumes. I know, before, the applications were a little bit difficult because you had to do knowledge, skills, and abilities which took time to fill out. Ms. Major added that, for years, the State did not want resumes.

The State is looking to replace the OASIS system and requesting \$11,000,000.00. OASIS is the Child Welfare program that has been in existence for at least 15 years. Twenty years ago, the State had a deadline to create an automated Child Welfare system. As the deadline approached, they were in danger of losing the money so they were given another state's system, believed to be from Oklahoma. OASIS has never worked well, worked right, is cumbersome and complicated, and we are no longer in federal compliance.

The State is also looking to replace the VACMS system and has requested the money to do so. The VACMS system has not been in existence long and has never worked like it was supposed to from the beginning. Partly because they didn't consider talking to the people on the front lines about what was needed. Ms. Major commented that it was supposed to be a Child Care system and then became a Benefits system and it has never been right or worked correctly. Mrs. Weakley stated that one of the things that happened with VACMS is the application process. What would have taken 20 minutes on the old system now is taking an hour and half on the VACMS system. It slowed everything down, but staff were expected to process the same amount of applications. The other issue with VACMS is latency time. When the system buffers, there is nothing else the worker can do because everything is online and very few things a worker is able to do while waiting. As the process of bringing in the VACMS system occurred, we had staff quit or retire because they did not want to learn a new system.

An ex-employee of DMAS (Department of Medical Assistance and the owner of Medicaid) who left about a year ago gained access to their computers. This ex-employee sent out a statement to everyone age 55 and older receiving Medicaid. The statement informed them that upon their death Medicaid would come in and take everything they had including their homes. DMAS was unaware about the letter until they started receiving numerous phone calls. Our agency was not affected. DMAS is sending out a disregard letter. The letter was not 100% accurate. It is true that if you are in a nursing home and it's being paid for by Medicaid that Medicaid will try to recoup the funds they paid out. Mr. Crockett stated this has always been the case. Mrs. Weakley concurred. Mrs. Mackie asked what happened to the ex-employee. Mrs. Weakley stated that information has not been shared.

Social Services is also requesting that the State put some money in a State supported supplement for SNAP. Most seniors were only eligible for \$10.00 a month if they received social security. During COVID, seniors were being given the maximum amount allowed. Mr. Martin inquired if the State would take that back. Mrs. Weakley responded that what they are looking at is for the State to put some money in a federal program since the feds are still going to limit it to the \$10.00. The request is that the State supplement for senior citizens so they get a higher benefit as they received during COVID. Ms. Major added that everyone received the maximum. Mr. Martin stated that the reduction could be a

shock. Ms. Major responded that persons receiving \$200.00 a month now would go back down to the \$10.00 a month.

There is a huge focus on CPS (Child Protective Services) responses. In the past, there were no deadlines. Deadlines are now based on the age of the child and the severity of the complaint and have to be responded to within 24 hours, 48 hours, and 5 days. Across the State, the eastern region is doing the worst. We are, of course, a part of the eastern region and cases are not being responded to within the State guidelines, which is causing some issues with federal. A big part of the issue is staffing. Every agency is losing staff. Many people are leaving because they feel like they cannot take the stress anymore. Some staff, who have been here for a while, were not a part of the raise in the minimum salaries. They became very angry and we saw more of our veteran workers leave. At least one, if not two, are on their way out the door now. The State had a big meeting on what we can do, but they really didn't have any good suggestions. Some suggestions were to start paying a sign on bonus. That would not go over well with the people who are already angry about not getting the raise in salary. There is supposedly a pay equity study that is going to happen, but they indicate it will probably take ten years to complete. Additional money to be placed into Family's First has been requested, but we have not even been able to hire the first person. The position has been continuously advertised since July 2020. There have been four applications in all that time. One person withdrew saying she did not mean to apply. One was offered an interview and turned it down saying she took a position elsewhere. Another we were not able to make contact. This leaves us one person to interview. We have four Family Services Specialist positions open and another leaving at the end of the month. The Child Welfare staff are stressed and that is the reason we are not meeting all of the deadlines. Another issue seen across the state is if a call comes in and it's someone that we have never worked with before and the person says the child is four years old, but turns out the child is two and a half years old. The response time will be set for a four year old and when it is realized that the child is actually two and a half years old; it is already too late. There is nothing that can be done to fix this. Complainants may not know the actual age of the child when they call in. Some agencies are artificially changing the deadlines saying everything has to be responded to within 24 hours. While that might be ideal, if you do not have the staff, it is not going to be possible. Other agencies are changing to shift work so there is a morning shift and then an afternoon or evening shift. The suggestions given were not helpful.

There is discussion about having a regional job fair in Virginia Beach, but it may not do us any good here on the Shore. If it was ideal for someone, we have the housing issue for them to contend with. Mrs. Weakley stated that she was open to suggestions by the Board. Mr. Crockett stated there really are none. Ms. Major concurred there is no housing available. Mrs. Weakley stated that she called some people that had applied for the Office Associate III position, when it was open, who would not have been eligible for that position because they had no experience, but stated that an Office Associate II position was open and they would be perfect for it and should apply. They would respond that they would go apply, but never did.

They are also looking at switching us back to Microsoft Office after we went to Google Mail. Ms. Major inquired why they wanted to change back. Mrs. Weakley responded that she believes it is a security issue. At one point they said that they would allow agencies to decide which they wanted, but they did that when they went from Outlook to Google Mail but Outlook was extremely reduced in terms of what you could do. They are also looking at iCloud which they have stated in the past that it was not secure enough.

Finally, the State is considering participation in Unit Us which is another new computer program that is supposed to allow agencies to make referrals to other agencies on behalf of a client and receive some kind of information back of whether the referral was accepted. There is a big push across the state for that. I think it is related to the No Wrong Door initiative so that people don't have to go to five places to get all the services they need. They would be able to process an application wherever they enter the system. This will be voluntary so it will be up to each organization whether or not they choose to participate in it. The State says there is no cost to the agency.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 6 – COVID Update**. Mrs. Weakley stated that we seem to be having more instances with people having COVID than we have in the past. So far, no one has been exposed in the agency building that we know of. Everyone who has tested positive had been out of the building enough days before the time that they were sick; therefore, we did not have to shut the agency down. We are hoping that continues. I think everyone is getting very weary which is why we are seeing so many people leave. Mr. Martin stated that he has known many people contracting it. Ms. Major inquired if staff were still wearing masks. Mrs. Weakley responded that, while they were not excited about it and after some initial arguments, staff have complied. Some employees are worried that the vaccine will become mandatory.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 7 – Vacancy Update**. Mrs. Weakley stated there are two vacancies in the Clerical Unit. Two emergency hires were brought in, but neither one is interested in a full time position. One speaks Spanish, which is great. Our plan is to cross-train them with the fuel department so they can cover the clerical office and fuel assistance program that started on October 1, 2021. We still have the two vacancies though. I offered the Office Associate II position to the only candidate who appeared to have the skills to do the job and she declined. I offered the Office Associate III position, which is a junior supervisor, to a gentleman I thought would be great for the job. He had to give a month's notice to the hospital. Two weeks into the months' notice, he called and said he was taking another job offer. Mr. Crockett asked how many vacancies there were at this moment. Mrs. Weakley responded that there are four vacancies in Family Services, two vacancies in the Clerical Unit, one in the Fuel Department and the other two in the Fuel Department are talking about leaving. Mr. Crockett then asked how many current employees we had. Mrs. Weakley stated that at full staff, 58. The last statistics received by the State indicate that we have now crossed their danger threshold in vacancies. As stated previously, we have another employee leaving at the end of this month and one retiring at the end of December 2021. Mr. Phillips asked what happens when you hit that threshold. Mrs. Weakley responded that the State will probably start calling and asking what is being done about it. It was believed by Mrs. Weakley that the agency was already in a precarious spot. The State did not consider it until this last report that came out a week ago. Two Family Services Specialist positions are advertised now. One is in Adult Services and the other is in Child Welfare. We received two applications for Adult Services; one of which backed out. At this moment, I cannot remember the status of the other one. With the Family Services positions, we have received four applications and only one is willing to interview. This still leaves us significantly understaffed. Mr. Phillips asked how many of those could you hire off the street. Mrs. Weakley responded that she could hire the clerical staff off the street. All of the Family Services Specialist positions require a human services related degree. Attempts are made to stretch the requirements where possible. The State requires a human services related degree or social work degree, but there are a few others they will accept or any degree with two years' experience. During the interview, if the applicant has some built-in skills that they are bringing to the table, credit will be given for anything the State may allow. Mr. Phillips asked how far back would you go when you were fully staffed. Mrs. Weakley replied, before COVID. We were doing really well before then. We had a few people leave before COVID, one married and moved across the bay, and one retired March of 2019, but that had been planned for a year. We were stable at the beginning, but the further we got into it, people started leaving and it has been difficult to replace them. Ms. Major inquired about contacting some of the colleges. Housing will still be an issue, but maybe contact some of the closer colleges. Mrs. Weakley stated there have been a few of those apply, but they have always taken a job in Norfolk or Virginia Beach. Mrs. Weakley continued to say that Virginia Beach offers a higher salary than any agency in the state. Mr. Crockett added the State is not allowing the people doing the hiring to use their common sense and the experience that they gave to hire people. It will not change until they give them the latitude. Until the State changes the requirement that a certain degree is preferred; there is nothing that can be done. They need to consider other options that allow the person doing the hiring to balance that out. Mr. Phillips agreed. Mr. Crockett continued and gave an example of when he was hiring at the sheriff's department and was able to balance out experience versus education. Ms. Major stated that in Northampton County there are Family Services Specialist who have other degrees that were hired when the hiring guidelines were different. Mrs. Weakley stated that years ago, that was very common. Mr. Crockett stated that people learn the job when they get the job. He further stated if you ask any lawyer in Accomack County how their

college degree help them with performance in court; they will tell you zero. They will tell you they learned when they were with other lawyers. Until that is allowed again, nothing is going to change. Mrs. Weakley stated that in her thirty years she has meet some people that have some natural abilities and life experience skills that are awesome and would hire them even without a degree. We have tried to stretch the experience piece as much as possible. One person volunteered with the March of Dimes. We stretched that and felt like if we could get them in for an interview and feel like they had the basic skills then we were going to go for it. Ms. Major stated that they wouldn't even consider someone who wants to go to school and learn the skills. Mrs. Weakley concurred and added the State would not even consider someone who was graduating in a month with the degree that is acceptable because they may not complete the course to receive the degree. The applications are just not coming in. Before COVID, we were doing a good job and brought in good quality people, but once COVID hit it has been null. Ms. Major stated that right now is a job seekers market.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 6 – Financial Statement – Administrative Office Manager – Wendy Linton**. Mrs. Linton stated the Local Budget was \$816,299.00. The Year-To-Date Local Expenditures is \$183,502.67 and the Total Local Balance-To-Date is \$632,796.33. Mr. Crockett stated that the numbers look good. You are 6.65% below budget on expenditures. Anything that brings concern to you at all? Ms. Linton stated, no, all the departments are working together to try to use their allotments and trying to find ways to help in the community.

Closed Session - On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mr. Phillips, the Board went into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing Employee evaluation (EPPE) T. Greenley and Director's Consult as permitted by the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2.3712.

On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mr. Martin, the Board returned from Closed Session and confirmed the only items discussed were the ones listed on the Board Members' Agenda. Ms. Major called a vote (Mr. Mackie – yes; Mr. Martin – yes; Mr. Whalen – yes; Mr. Crockett – yes; Mr. Phillips – yes; and Ms. Major – yes).

Mr. Crockett made a motion to approve the EPPE, seconded by Mr. Phillips. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 16, 2021, at 9:30 A.M.

APPROVED: **Cassandra Reneta Major**

ATTEST: **Vicki Weakley**