

The Accomack County Board of Social Services met at its facility on Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at 9:30 A.M. Present in person were Ms. Reneta Major, Chairman; Mr. David Whalen, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Jackie Phillips; Mr. Robert Martin; Mrs. Minnie White; Mrs. Vicki Weakley, Secretary; and Nadine Greenley, Assistant Director.

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

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 3 – Approve Minutes of June 17, 2025**. Mr. Whalen made a motion, seconded by Mr. Martin, to approve the Minutes as written. Hearing no discussion, the motion carried.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 4 - Fraud Report**. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mrs. White, to approve the fraud report. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 5 – Presentation from Kamesha Watson, Office Supervisor**. Mrs. Weakley stated that Ms. Watson is the last presenter for the educational series to inform the Board of how the agency functions. Ms. Watson introduced herself as the supervisor of the front office and energy assistance. The front office is the heart of the agency. They speak to almost everyone that comes in. The daily routine begins at 7:00 a.m., which is the time that the first employee arrives. The first duty is to check the blue box located outside at the front of the building and then process anything from that box that was dropped off overnight such as applications and enter them into the Virginia Case Management System (VACMS). The office is also responsible for checking the fax machine and delivering them to the appropriate departments. At 8:30 a.m., the phone system turns on for incoming calls and the front door is open to the public. Calls coming through the main system are answered by the front office and directed to the appropriate departments including Adult Protective Services (APS) and Child Protective Services (CPS) crisis calls. The supervisor of the APS and CPS units provides a list of who is taking calls for a particular day. The front office processes Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid applications as well as issuing all Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. All clients/guests must sign the iPad which manages client information, and the front office ensures that the process occurs before services are rendered as it is mandated by the State. Clients are assisted daily with renewals, applications, or any questions on understanding verifications that the case workers are requesting to have their cases processed. There is a courier bag that goes out on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. All documents are placed in that bag with the agency's Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) code to ensure it reaches the proper department. The energy department consists of two employees. They handle heating assistance which begins in October. This assistance helps clients to heat their homes with kerosene, gas, or wood. Heating repair is also available, which helps clients repair their home heating unit and it also allows a heating source to be provided if there is a need. Crisis assistance begins in January. This is when a client has already received assistance but needs additional assistance for the remaining winter months. The clients must provide receipts from the previous assistance to prove it was used for the specified service. If a client's gas is at a 10% level or their electric bill is in disconnect status, the crisis assistance can provide additional services. Cooling begins in June. For this service, a client must be over 65 years of age, disabled, or have a child in the home under the age of 5 years old. The agency can assist with payment towards an electric bill or by providing an air conditioning unit for the home. Last year, energy assistance served approximately 3,177 clients. Mr. Martin inquired if the services provided were based on income level. Ms. Watson stated, yes. In addition, the energy department also handles Members Helping Members, which is A & N Electric Cooperative's program for assisting individuals with their light bills. Mrs. White inquired what the blue box contains and how much is usually in it. Ms. Watson replied that the blue box is available for clients after hours to drop off applications and documents requested by a case worker. The client will write the case workers' name on the information and the front office will ensure it is delivered to them. Ms. Major commented that if it was not for supporting staff, things would not get done. Mr. Phillips inquired if Ms. Watson's unit was fully staffed. Ms. Watson stated that her unit is fully staffed and that is a great thing. Ms. Watson added that the front office is always busy, and the phones are always ringing. The 1<sup>st</sup> through the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the month is very busy. The SNAP program offers a Sun Bucks program, using information from the schools, which is supposed to be mailed out on Friday. Individuals are calling the agency now

stating that they haven't received their card, but in the past, some addresses from the school will differ from the home address of the student. The front office will issue those as well. Mrs. White inquired, what are Sun Bucks. Ms. Watson replied that Sun Bucks is a program through the SNAP program, using information from Accomack County public schools, where families can receive assistance to feed their children through the summer. It's basically a summer feeding program. Ms. Major inquired about how many calls are received by the front office that are not related to social services such as calls for social security because the community thinks they are directly related. Ms. Watson replied that by and large the front office receives it all. They receive numerous call for the Social Security Administration and Child Support Enforcement. Ms. Major commended Ms. Watson on the work the front office does and to keep up the great work. The Board in unison expressed the same.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 6 - Director's Notes**. Mrs. Weakley stated that since the last meeting she attended a Members Helping Members board meeting, a full staff meeting, Community Planning and Management Team (CPMT) meeting, Supervisor's meeting, and the Virginia League of Social Services Executive's (VLSSE) conference (The Assistant Commissioner stated at the conference that what appears to be in the future for agencies, which could change three hours from now with all the changes of the 'Big Bill'. Medicaid expansion is at risk. The current issue with Medicaid and SNAP is that the computer system (VACMS) does not work well. It creates some of the problems that workers are dealing with. It would cost around \$80MM to replace it and must be within the timeframe expectations of the federal government. There is no solution at this time. The State has been attempting to replace VACMS for more than two years, but the issue has always been funding. VACMS has been in existence for at least nine years, and all of the upgrades identified before it went into use have not been corrected. One issue with Medicaid is that renewals are completed once a year and they will now have to be done twice a year, which doubles the case work. The Governor initiated Child Welfare's 'Strong Kids, Safe Families'. The State is noticing that Virginia screens out more hotline reports than other states and they are trying to determine why. Some thoughts lead to the hotline not asking enough questions on the initial call for a social worker to be able to determine the validity. Social Workers do not have the authority to go into someone's home solely based on someone saying this home needs to be checked out. The agency must have policy driven reasons to enter a home. If those reasons do not come from the hotline, it is being determined not valid and skewing the numbers. It is undetermined if there is a possible solution, but it is another item the State wants the agencies to work on. Next, there are challenges with the new HR system, which was supposed to be a good thing, but it has instead made the process more difficult. There was a recent upgrade, and the upgrade is worse than the original and no good answers are given as to why things do not work as they should. With SNAP, normally it is a 50/50 share between state and federal. The federal government is changing that to a 25% federal share and 75% state share which is a \$90MM shift in cost with \$11MM being local cost. The change is proposed for October 2026, and it is non-negotiable. The only thing that can be changed is the error rate which VACMS is contributing to, and the federal government is proposing that if a state has an error rate of 6% or less there will be no match. If there is a 7% error rate there is a 5% match. There is a 5% increase match for each additional percentage rate of errors. Virginia currently has an 11.5% error rate which is up from 9.9% last year. This could be because of the increased focus on Medicaid and Medicaid unwinding so workers were not as able to pay as much attention to SNAP as they had been previously. There is a deadline of September 30, 2026, to reduce the error rate. At the end of this week, this agency must make a response to the Assistant Commissioner as to anything we believe might help. Mrs. Weakley met with the Benefit Supervisors yesterday and they are working today to see if there is anything they can suggest. Ms. Major asked if the agency had to come up with a plan. Mrs. Weakley stated that the agency has to propose what we think is causing some of the problems and any solutions that we think might make a difference. Ms. White asked if there was a bulk area where a majority of the errors occur. Mrs. Weakley responded that there is an issue with the error rate and it's a place where this agency gets stuck all the time. The State calculates the percentage of each agency's error rate, but the smaller the agency, the worse the statistics look. For example, in one review a worker made a \$0.43 mistake, and the agency was considered 100% out of compliance. This agency cannot make a single mistake, by those standards, which is an impossible standard to live up to. Places like Virginia Beach and Newport News can make a handful of mistakes and they will not go over the accepted negative error rate. For the \$0.43 mistake, the agency had to write

up a plan about how improvements could be made so the mistake did not happen again. Mrs. Greenley pulled reports from previous reviews to see if there was a pattern of mistakes or one particular item that was always a mistake. There was no pattern. It is a single error that hasn't been repeated. The single error rate makes it more challenging to make improvements. The State feels a lot of errors across the state are from misapplication of policy and income errors, but they were not specific as to what that was; however, the suspicion is that some income wasn't applied and it caused an overpayment or underpayment. A positive error rate, meaning we paid someone too much, is a larger problem than a negative error rate, which means we paid them too less. The agency is most likely to err on the side of the client and we have always been encouraged to err on the side of the client more than the other way around. It appears with the changes that the federal government is making that there will be fewer people eligible for SNAP which is going to create its own set of problems. SNAP is not a mandated program so the State could choose not to continue it. Ms. Major stated that it would create more crime and CPS issues. Mrs. Weakley continued that the primary function initially of SNAP was to subsidize the farmers. If it were to discontinue then the concern is what happens to the farms not growing food. It is very much a domino effect and at this point it is uncertain what will happen. Each state is looking at this and trying to figure out what to do and learn lessons from other states of what has worked and not worked for them. There is every indication that there will be more work requirements for anyone to receive either SNAP or Medicaid. Ms. Major inquired if Mrs. Weakley believes every agency will have to do SNAP E&T. Mrs. Weakley replied, yes, she believes that is forthcoming. Mrs. White inquired if that was done in the past. Mrs. Weakley stated that, yes, there was an FSET program that was the SNAP (food stamp) version of Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW). The problem with FSET was that the State never put much funding into it, so the funds that were able to be spent on a client to help them was \$25.00 a month. An agency Mrs. Weakley formerly worked for, would first try to help clients obtain their GED so they would have a greater chance of being employable. It was \$35.00 to take the GED test, so workers would pay \$25.00 one month and \$10.00 the next month, all the while hoping that the client would not close their case before the \$10.00 was paid. Initially, the funds would cover a bus pass for the client to job search, but when bus passes increased in price, that was no longer an option. There were also ways for agencies to earn funding depending on how many Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) were serviced. This agency did well and earned quite a bit of funding, but the funds couldn't be used on clients. So, they used the funds to form a program with the community college to do specific training for clients to be able to earn certificates and be more employable. There was always a challenge because the State put very little funding into it like they did for VIEW. Currently, there is a SNAP E&T program, but it is totally voluntary. There are very few people volunteering. Bedford County expressed in the conference how they only get one volunteer a month. It is believed the only reason the State is not making it mandatory is because there is no funding available to put into it. At some point that is likely to change. It is unclear if they will start to put additional funding into it, but it will be made mandatory. Currently, a client just needs to state that they are working. There is no requirement regarding how much money the client has to make or how many hours they must be working. That will probably change to a minimum of 20 hours a week, but no monetary amount is attached to that. At present a client who is 55 years of age is not required to comply with the work requirement, but that is being changed to 64 years of age. Looking at Medicaid, they are a population that is primarily children and the elderly, because it is covering people in nursing homes, and, particularly with expansion, a huge number of people who are working two and three jobs, that are not offered medical insurance or their jobs or offered medical insurance at a cost they cannot afford. In some instances, people who buy into the work medical insurance have almost their whole paycheck going towards it. The federal office for the heating and cooling program has been removed so there is no technical support or anyone to answer questions. The program is still in place but given that the federal administration office has closed and the Trump administration sees the heating and cooling program as a subsidy to big business and not help to poor people it is unclear how much longer the program will exist. Returning to the subject of Child Welfare, there are difficulties across the state where judges think Fostering Futures is a solution for 17-year-olds that come before their court. They are trying to give us custody of these older children. Fostering Futures is a program that is designed for children who have been in foster care for a while and are about to turn 18 years old. The program will pay them a subsidy if they are either working or in school. The case worker continues to visit them once a month and provides services and guidance. Through the program, some of the things the agency can do for the foster child

is purchase a computer or car and help them obtain a driver's license; all the things that someone would need in order to be self-sufficient. Mr. Whalen commented that you (the agency) have to be the parent. Mrs. Weakley acknowledged the comment stating, that is exactly what it is for. These are children who came into our custody and the agency was not able to resolve the issues for them to return home, there was no home to return to, or were not able to come up with an alternative plan such as a relative placement or adoption. Some of the older children that come into custody do not want to be adopted and that must be respected. Some will consider adoption or state that they want to stay with the foster family they are residing with, but they don't want the legal change where their parents are completely and permanently out of the picture. Judges think a 17-year-old who just came before them for theft of a car or other crime, needs to be placed into Fostering Futures by giving the agency custody mainly because the child is causing their parents so much trouble and the parents are requesting to be relinquished of custody. Discussions are being planned with judges and social workers throughout the state to help them understand this is not the solution to the problem. Ms. Linton stated no funding was received this year for Fostering Futures. There are currently three children in the program so a request was made to receive \$33,000 for the cost associated with them. Back to SNAP, it is anticipated that if SNAP benefits are reduced the agency will see an increase in both APS cases and CPS cases. That is a concern, because as the Board is already aware, the agency experiences difficulty receiving qualified applications particularly in Child Welfare. To reiterate, the Assistant Commissioner stated, these things could change quickly, later, but those are the things currently being prepared for and to primarily see what can be done to reduce the error rate in Virginia. Mrs. Greenley stated that only six states out of the fifty met the 6% error rate and would not have to put in any state dollars. Continued pressure of this nature will make employees leave and difficult to replace. Right now, the benefit units are fully staffed. That had not been the case since COVID. The more that is placed on individual workers, the more likely they are to make a mistake.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 7 & Item 8– Bylaws of the Accomack County Board of Social Services & Board Protocol of the Accomack County Board of Social Services**. Mrs. Weakley stated that members were given both the Bylaws and Protocol. There are no changes to the Protocol it has just been a while since the Board received a copy. In terms of the Bylaws, it was realized that there was no mention of the compensation and reimbursement that is in #9; therefore, it was added in. Because of the amendment, the Board must review and sign off approving the change. Mrs. White pointed out that the date is incorrect of the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of July for the adoption of the amendment. Mrs. Weakley stated that before the Chairman signs, she will change that date. Ms. Major asked if there were any changes to the Protocol. Mrs. Weakley stated, no and it does not require a vote. Mr. Whalen made a motion, seconded by Mrs. White that the amendment to the Bylaws of the Accomack County Board of Social Services be approved. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 9 – Purge Time & Attendance Records**. Mrs. Weakley stated that there are time and attendance records from July 2014 through January 2022, that need to be purged according to state guidelines. Mr. Whalen made a motion, seconded by Mr. Phillips, that the mentioned time and attendance records be purged. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Mrs. Weakley stated that it is July and the Board is to hold elections which was not part of the agenda. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mrs. White that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman remain the same for another term. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried. The officers will remain the same.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 10 – Financial Statement**. Ms. Linton stated that the financial report is not fine-tuned yet with the budgeting. All the programs as far as assistances and purchase of services are State funded and all of them are correct. The actual local budget is still being worked through as employees are being hired. There is a new employee coming to the fiscal department as well. Directing the Board's attention to line 866, which is the family support and preservation, reunification, and case worker we did a 5-year program which would run us to 2029 where \$20,000 would be received

per year. This year \$806.00 was received. The funds are used as needed for the first six months but also held onto just in case it is needed later. Line 806 will fluctuate as the expenses are moved around. The errors at the end will be corrected once an email is received from the person in charge of the funding to answer why the agency did not receive the projected \$20,000.00 this year. Ms. Major stated that the agency is at the beginning of the fiscal year so that is to be expected. Mr. Phillips inquired when the fiscal employee will start. Ms. Linton stated he will start August 1, 2025.

**Closed Session** – On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, the Board went into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing items stated only on the Agenda (Foster Care Case #21247084 and Director’s Consult) as permitted by the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2.3712. The motion carried.

On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, the Board returned from Closed Session and confirmed that the only items discussed were the ones listed on the Board Members’ Agenda. Ms. Major called a vote (Mr. Phillips – yes; Mr. Martin – yes; Mr. Whalen – yes; Mrs. White – yes; Ms. Major - yes). The motion carried.

Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whalen, that the Board accept foster care case #21247084. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Mr. Phillips inquired about the procedure for who can be elected to the Accomack County Board of Social Services. Ms. Major stated that she was going to check with her person about District 8 & 9. One person must be a representative and the other person could be at large in the community. Mr. Phillips and Ms. Major asked members if they knew of anyone who may want to serve. Mrs. White stated that she may know of someone.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 19, 2025, at 9:30 A.M.

Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Martin, to adjourn the meeting at 11:14 A.M.

APPROVED: **Cassandra Reneta Major** \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: **Vicki Weakley** \_\_\_\_\_