

## **Macon County Social Services Board**

February 20, 2019

Minutes

### **Call to Order**

Patrick Betancourt called the regular meeting of the Macon County Social Services Board to order in the Administrative Conference Room at the Department of Social Services. Members in attendance were: Lisa Leatherman, Darlene Green, Evelyn Southard, Patrick Betancourt, Secretary to the Board and Cathy Makinson, Business Officer designated to record minutes.

### **Minutes**

Approval of minutes was deferred to next month due to information Patrick provided for Board to review provided by UNC School of Government on what is required in open and closed board minutes.

### **Program Report**

Agenda was restructured to allow Social Work Supervisors David Smith and Lisa Hilliard to report to the Board on the realities of caseload demands which was the reason of the approved request to hire two additional social workers. An article regarding this headlined the Franklin Press and they were able to elaborate as well as give specific information to the Board on case complexities and how additional positions would address agency needs. The article states that social workers are currently above the state recommended caseload of 15. In comparison, many of these same cases served by mental health agencies utilize a three member team for each case with a maximum of 12 cases and are able to assist these families long-term. DSS workers dealing with these cases individually have to focus on keeping children safe and are expected to stabilize and make a case decision within 45 days. David reported that when he began 10-11 years ago, that out of 12 cases, there were only 1-2 cases requiring intensive involvement and 8-10 presenting less critical issues such as discipline, anger, substance abuse of one caregiver. Presently, the opposite is true with reports having multiple allegations, and both caregivers with substance abuse and/or mental health issues.

DSS is using every resource available with In-Home Services cases and are still seeing an increase in petitions that include taking custody. The majority of these cases, because the issues do not have a quick fix, are adding to the back up in court cases being heard. The cases have to be adjudicated before court ordered actions can be taken which in the past, was accomplished within a couple court dates. Presently, with only one court day available each month, workers along with our attorney have to triage and prioritize which cases are heard. These delays also increase the demand for the social workers to maintain safety of the children while waiting on these actions. After all the intensive services provided for the family, children come in to foster care, now referred to as "permanency planning" while issues are addressed with the caretakers. Custody has now become a respite for these individuals to drop out of their child's daily life instead of a wake call to change or seek help so their family can be reunified. Social workers' stress level has increased because of the failures of NC FAST as a case management system where workers are expected to document all the work they have done to try to assist the family and their concern over a traumatized child having to go back home.

Lisa gave examples of new state policies including

- \*Seeing every child "in the home", every month with DSS having 64 children in custody. These visits have to be in the home, not just school or daycare and many times occur after work hours.
- \*They are required not only to speak with the foster mom, but the foster dad who may work late.
- \*The worker has to contact the biological parent every month visit the biological home every other month.
- \*Permanency planning meetings that used to take ½ day per month now take three full days per month.
- \*Workers have to go in every building on the property including sheds, out buildings, etc., regardless of the allegations and acknowledge this on the foster care reporting.
- \*Then add NCF difficulties on top of all of this, and the new policies not being updated in the system.

Patrick stated that no data with outcomes following these additional requirements has been compiled and it is not evidence based. The Directors Association has advocated 15-20 years for the state to have an evidence informed practice model to train social workers so they have real, productive intervention experience to work with families. Patrick also mentioned the challenge we now have in adding two new social workers as there is no more space in that section to add workers. The child welfare staffing crisis affects all counties across the state but no action is being taken to mitigate the crisis. Buncombe County offers more than \$20,000 salary increase above what Macon is able to offer for the same positions and does not require workers to work on weekends or evenings on call and have a cap of 8-10 cases. Western counties have partnered with WCU on a simulation project where social workers would utilize a set up house and standardized family and have interaction in a safe environment to get real time feedback. The state was asked if this training could replace the required pre-service and the state has not agreed but they will come and evaluate at a later time and make a formal determination.

### **Financials**

Business Officer Cathy Makinson updated the Board on the status of the energy programs with approximately \$49,000 remaining in Crisis Funds and \$29,000 remaining in LIEAP funds. Cathy also informed the Board on the Department Head budget meeting with the County Manager that took place last week. Budget is due to County on March 14. Discussion was held regarding changing the Board meeting as they have to approve the budget prior to handing it in to County Finance. Financials were provided in Board books.

### **Old Business**

Patrick reported that due to the finding in FY 18 related to processing material weakness in Medicaid, a letter was sent to Commissioner Chairman Tate requesting DSS to develop a response to that audit finding. Even though the error was only \$80.06, if testing extended to the Medicaid population served and the error rate applied, it could amount to more than \$25k and therefore had to develop a corrective plan. The error occurred in a SSI termination case where Medicaid should have been terminated. Workers have to look in the SSI system to see what cases are being terminated because the NCF report is not up to date. DSS drafted an eight step corrective action plan on how we would address this material weakness. Patrick made the response letter available to the Board to read. He also stated that moving forward, NC Division of Medical Benefits will audit 20 Medicaid cases per month for 10 months of every year would begin in 2021 to catch any processing concerns.

### **New Business**

Patrick updated the Board on Medicaid Transportation. NC is going to a managed care instead of fee for service with Macon in Region I, rolling out in 2/2020. The state announced at the beginning of this month, the four companies selected to provide the managed care as PHPs, Prepaid Health Plan providers. There are no changes in eligibility rules, services, treatments and cost sharing. Maximus had previously been selected as the enrollment broker.

### **Closed Session**

Lisa Leatherman made a motion to go into Closed Session to discuss personnel information as allowed under G.S. 143-318.11. Darlene Green seconded, and motion carried.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for the evening of Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in the DSS Administrative Conference Room.

APPROVED BY:

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Chairman | Date

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Secretary | Date