

St. Mary's County
Department of Social Services Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

The regular scheduled meeting of the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services Advisory Board was held Tuesday, January 25, 2022.

Member's Present:

Michael Blackwell, Chair
Annette Wood
Anthony Branch
Cynthia Brown
Terry Prochnow

Also, Present:

Alexis Zoss, Director

- I. Call to Order
 - a. The meeting was called to order 5:35pm
- II. Establish Quorum
 - a. A quorum was established
- III. Approval of Minutes
 - a. A motion was made to accept the October 25, 2021 meeting minutes. Second motion.
Minutes approved

Director Report

Medical Respite – Update

Work on the improving the medical services and how it will be put into place has continued over the past 4-5 months. Work continues with the hospital to figure out where the medical services will come into place. Terry Prochnow has agreed to consult on the project. The MOU will start small to get the program started and optimism that the program will eventually grow into what it is envisioned to become.

DSS held an All Staff meeting in January. There continue to be challenges of recruitment of new staff, not specific to SMC but in many of the district offices. Over a 1-year time span we have seen 18 resignations, 2 of which were retirements and 13 new hires. There have been approximately 140 COVID employee related situations all of which have been handled by HR. The Family Investment division is stable in program staff. There is an average of 7,000 SNAP benefit cases with approximately \$3 million worth of benefits distributed to eligible households each month.

Child Support division averages \$1 million in collections monthly.

Customer Care Team averages 120 calls per day.

In July of 2017, the Lexington Park office saw 1700 customer walk-ins. In September 2019, there were less than 600 and December 2021 was a total of 148.

It is projected that the amount of Adult and Child Protective Services referrals will continue to rise.

Services Intake is the single point of entry for the homeless. There is an average of 250 calls monthly from customers regarding homelessness.

ERAP took much time to get up and running. \$2.5 million has been paid out since July 2021. We are currently out of funding and are awaiting the next amount to be disbursed.

DSS continues to respond and adjust to the needs of the community and our employees.

Per the Management Team, some of the biggest accomplishments over the past year have been working from a hybrid schedule, continuing to transition and adjust to electronic records, the creation of an appointment-based customer service system, navigating the national supply chain issues, new VOIP phone system, new CPS/APS hotline and new helpful tools in the services divisions. One management team member stated, "We are nimble".

Jennifer Neff has formally announced as the Deputy Director. She will oversee 7 senior level administrative positions in the Services and Family Investment divisions.

Chair Report

MASSB Conference was held last Saturday. The presentation included 2 Bills in which we may need to intervene.

SB 203 – Streamline the permanent guardianship process. Bring us into compliance with the federal law – “clean-up bill”

SB 2014 – Department of Social Services can report if school personnel has neglected a child(ren). This is expected to move forward

SB 175 – Elder Abuse – Banking institutions are “covered” in the event of potential elder financial abuse – the bank is not held liable

(Power Point Presentation)

- Hospital Overstays – left over from earlier legislation – Children in the ER may be discharged and not have a residence. Discharged to an appropriate level of care. The state has concerns and may possibly amend. We may be asked as a board to write a letter to the effect. When there is no placement for a child, pressure is put on DSS and other agencies are sometimes hoteling the youth with staff.
- Child Support Driver’s License Suspensions – Those who do not pay their child support obligation are at risk; Concerns that this may interfere with those receiving the child support; Those with 3 times less than the poverty level would not be referred to the driver’s license suspension.
- Foster Parents – Those who are into their 4th year, would have legal standing at that point. This could potentially delay placement and/or cause a delay in the legal process. We are not in favor of this bill.
- Possible Creation of a database of those in an Adult Protective Services case.

Other Items of Discussion

Health Share, Inc. has ended. The HS board has funding that may be converted into mini grants to support the community regarding medical expenses. Is this something the board may want to consider being involved with to utilize these funds? Grants could possibly be in the amount of 410k. Yes. The board is interested and will research further on how to proceed.

Motion to adjourn – 2nd

Meeting adjourned at 6:28pm

N. Sacks