

The Accomack County Board of Social Services met at its facility on Tuesday, January 15, 2019, at 9:30 A.M. Present were Ms. Reneta Major, Vice-Chairman; Mrs. Elsie Mackie; Mr. Robert B. Martin; Mr. Robert Crockett; Mr. John Sparkman; and Mrs. Vicki J. Weakley, Secretary. Ms. Laura B. Gordy, Chairman, was absent.

Ms. Major called the meeting to order. Mr. Crockett gave the Invocation.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 3 – Approve Minutes of December 18, 2018**. On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mr. Sparkman, the Minutes of December 18, 2018 were approved as written.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 4 – Introduction of Rudy Zavala – CSA Coordinator**. Mrs. Weakley stated Mr. Zavala had been with the agency since January 2, 2019. Mr. Zavala stated he had been a Supervisor with Therapeutic Interventions for five years and had dealt with nine schools in Accomack County. He had provided intensive home services and mentoring services. He further stated he is now learning the rules and policies of the new position.

Mr. Crockett then stated Mr. Zavala had joined a good department and the Board was confident Mr. Zavala would keep everything in order so we would not lose money. Ms. Major stated the Board was glad to have Mr. Zavala onboard. Mr. Crockett stated filling the CSA position was long overdue. Ms. Major further stated Mr. Zavala was the first CSA Coordinator for both Counties and she was also glad to have him onboard.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 5 – Fraud Report by Frances Bailey, Fraud Investigator**. Ms. Major stated the Fraud Report looked good. At that time Mr. Crockett stated Mrs. Bailey did a great job with her presentation. He would like for her to give another report within a year which would give us some comparisons to review after she has settled into the new position comparing her current work, at the time, to the previous year's reports to the Board. Ms. Major stated Mrs. Bailey is enthusiastic.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 6 – Director's Report**. Mrs. Weakley attended a meeting called by the DSS Commissioner relative to the JLARC report. Mrs. Weakley reported the recommendations for improvement listed in the report were top heavy. There were five people at the Central Office. She stated we need more people on the ground, and in the field, in order to meet all requirements. They are anticipating DSS will be seeing some legislation coming through resulting from the JLARC study.

Mr. Crockett asked Mrs. Weakley if the VDSS Commissioner discussed bringing more people to agencies where the work is being done instead at the top end? Mrs. Weakley stated that was a major concern and VDSS plans to talk with legislators and see how to make that happen. Social Services has been increasing requirements over time, for example: in the past we were required to visit foster children quarterly and currently we are required to visit them monthly; however, no one considered the additional time involved in tripling the required number of visits. Making additional requirements does not solve the problem. We are hoping the caseload study will show 15 foster care cases for a case worker is too much. Mrs. Weakley stated she hoped the caseload study would give workers a more reasonable caseload size.

Mrs. Weakley stated she also attended a Healthy Communities meeting, four truancy meetings, and a CPMT (Community Policy and Management Team) meeting.

Ms. Major thanked Mrs. Weakley for sending the Board Members the JLARC MEMO. Also, Mr. Crockett thanked Mrs. Weakley supporting his forwarding the letter to our representatives. He further stated the JLARC report, made it sound like every LDSS agency was involved in the poor foster practices.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 7 – Official approval to follow local inclement weather and holiday schedule.** Mrs. Weakley stated it is now official. All copies have been signed and Accomack County DSS can follow Accomack County's local inclement weather and holiday schedule. The agency is now officially a "Partially Deviating" agency.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 8 – JLARC Memo.** Pursuant to a request by Mr. Crockett at the December 18, 2018 meeting, Mrs. Weakley prepared a MEMO for the Board relative to the JLARC report dated December 10, 2018 concerning Virginia's Foster Care System. The MEMO set forth the three items in the study which did affect ACDSS, as follows: 1) the court process can slow up the TPR (termination of parental rights), especially if a parent appeals. This can lengthen the time a child spends in foster care; 2) We do have difficulty recruiting foster parents. This has been an ongoing issue that we continue to struggle with. We are open to any suggestions to improve this situation; and 3) Recruitment and retention of Family Service Specialists has also been an ongoing issue for us. The job title change (from Social Worker to Family Services Specialist) had some unintended consequences when people with Social Work training made the decision not to apply for Family Service Specialist jobs, as they wanted to be Social Workers. In addition to this, the work is difficult, stressful and often not appreciated. Beginning pay is low, considering the expectations of the work, raises are not consistent, and smaller localities, like Accomack County, do not have the resources to supplement worker pay, like some larger localities do.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 9 – Update on Medicaid Expansion and Item 10 – Government Shutdown Effects.** Mrs. Weakley stated the previous week she received three emails in one day, related to the Government Shutdown. She further stated the memos stated TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) is a priority and we needed to get cases resolved. Within one hour she got a second email stating Accomack County DSS was not doing well with Medicaid renewals and we needed to make that a priority. The third email stated we were behind in processing SNAP cases. They further stated everything had to be processed by January 20th and to make that a priority. Unfortunately, later the January 20th date was changed to Tuesday, January 15th. Mrs. Weakley stated the benefit staff were working hard to get everything processed by the end of that day. We did everything possible; i.e., we called each client that was affected and asked them to get their information in right away. We still had a lot of people who had not reported or turned in their papers. Mrs. Weakley stated she is expecting many phone calls by February 1st. The State had promised to send out public service announcements to let people know what was happening. Between the bad weather here, the short deadline and the two upcoming holidays, we were somewhat handicapped at meeting all the deadlines.

Following the snow day, Mrs. Weakley came into the office and found an email saying the State had given us money to pay overtime to get the SNAP cases processed. She stated some workers came over the weekend and also on January 14th.

Mrs. Mackie inquired whether the State had indicated they were going to notify clients why they are not getting their food stamps, if the government shut down continues. Mrs. Mackie stated she had another question. If clients are approved and no benefits are available will the benefits be retroactive when

the Government reopens? Mrs. Weakley stated when the Government opens up clients will get retroactive benefits. She further stated it is also tax refund time so people may be able to have access to that money.

Mrs. Weakley then stated she had not heard anything about the State doing a notice to clients regarding changes in receiving their food stamps. Mrs. Weakley stated Accomack County DSS came out on the top 10 overdue Medicaid renewals list. We are off the list now and we have a plan to fix the issue. We have had several conversations with the Regional Office with reference to that and the fact that of the 14 benefit workers only four have more than one year's experience. The State training for Medicaid Expansion that was discussed has turned out to be additional training for people already trained and not for new workers, which has resulted in delays in getting everyone trained on Medicaid and processing applications and renewals.

Ms. Major proceeded to Item 11 – Overdue Medicaid Renewals. Mrs. Weakley stated when she assumed the duties of Director two years ago we had 881 overdue Medicaid renewals. Mr. Crockett inquired about the 881 overdue renewals and when that occurred. Mrs. Weakley stated it was in March two years ago when she assumed the duties of Director. On January 7, 2019 we had 136 overdue renewals. She further stated the current week of January 15, 2019 we were down to 100. Mr. Crockett inquired when we had 881 were we at the top of the list and if there was a "Top Ten List". Mrs. Weakley stated there was no top list at that time. There were a number of agencies with a large number of Medicaid Overdue Renewals. At that time Accomack's numbers were pretty equivalent to agencies like Virginia Beach and Norfolk. We have had a large turnover rate in benefits, starting with the switch to VaCMS (Virginia Case Management System) and it hasn't stopped, although we seem to be recovering. Most recently we had a worker leave to move to Northern Virginia and two workers leave to go to Social Security for a \$7,000 pay increase.

Mr. Crockett then stated three facts; i.e., the State has known about this for a long time; 2) when Mrs. Weakley took over as Director there were 881 overdue renewals and now we have 137; and 3) now the State has set up a "Top10 worst list", to covering themselves. They have known about this and they took no action to help resolve the issue. Mr. Crockett stated he wanted this documented in the minutes.

Ms. Major stated they were good points, but she wanted to inquire whether during that time they sent consultants. Mrs. Weakley stated they have offered; however, she opted not to accept that as their first suggestion is "just go in and close everyone and let them reapply." That creates such havoc in the community. It causes a lot of our adult population to have their portion of Medicaid shut off that pays for their Medicare and it takes three months to get reinstated, which creates a hardship for our elderly population. We have resisted doing that because of the negative impact on our community. Workers have made telephone calls to clients to encourage them to get their information and explain the criticalness of doing so. This takes time, but is better for our community. Mr. Crockett stated it is a good cause.

Ms. Major continued and stated she had one other question. She inquired how helpful would it be for the adult service workers to obtain renewal information when they visit an adult home? Sometimes adult service workers at Northampton County DSS assist benefits by doing this. She did not know how that would work at ACDSS. Mrs. Weakley stated there is a good relationship between our adult service workers and benefit workers and they do assist with getting information from clients. We only had one worker doing long term care and that person was promoted to supervisor. We now have a new person doing

long term care and the backup worker also got a promotion and went to intake unit. We are now in the process of having that person handle all of the long term care applications. Everything was falling on the one worker and it was definitely too much for one person to handle. We will be moving all long term care applications to the worker in the intake unit, which we were unable to do until this point. It is getting better; however, it is moving slower than what the State would like because they are solely looking at the bottom line and the numbers. We are also looking at the numbers; however, we are also looking at our community and the impact on our staff. The families and children supervisor spoke with Mrs. Weakley the previous Friday and they think the overdue renewals will be handled, but the issue is complicated by the fact that we currently have 137 additional cases due during the month of January. We believe we will be able to handle the overdues, but we will not be able to get everything current that is due this month. We are working to get everything cleaned up as soon as possible. Mrs. Weakley stated she would not be surprised if she receives another letter from the VDSS Commissioner. Mr. Crockett then stated our numbers are good as we have brought the overdue renewals down from 881 to 137.

Ms. Major stated comparing our agency to Virginia Beach and other big cities should warrant more staff. Mrs. Weakley stated it appears they are focusing more on Medicaid Expansion. The State did not count on Medicaid Expansion resulting in the call volume skyrocketing; i.e., clients calling to ask questions and to add another person to their cases. The State said they were going to encourage people to apply online and they would handle the applications and forward them to us to follow up. They had not counted on clients calling to add a spouse or another person to the case. The person was not eligible under the previous Medicaid; however, with Medicaid Expansion they were now eligible to be added. No one predicted this to occur. This application then goes to the ongoing worker who has the case to have the person added to the case.

Mrs. Weakley further stated we continue to have problems with the computer system. We have two computer systems – one is ours, VaCMS and the other is MMIS which is DMAS (Department of Medical Assistance Services). They are supposed to talk but they do not always “talk”, accurately. For example, we get someone approved for Medicaid in our system, but it does not bridge over into the Medicaid system. We then have a parent at CVS trying to get medication for child and they are being told the child does not have Medicaid. They call us and we have to drop what we are doing to focus on getting the child their medication. Another issue is people were not told they had a choice on who their MCO (Managed Care Agencies) would be. There are six MCO's but only three are accepted by our local hospital. The ones who do not have the acceptable MCO are unaware until they go to the emergency room. Then, they call here upset. They were assigned the MCO before they were told they could choose their MCO. This has been very confusing for people. Mrs. Weakley stated she called the toll free number and nowhere on the message was there “if you want to change your MCO press this number” or “if you want to speak with an operator press this number.” Mrs. Weakley stated she hit 0 for the operator and it went through smoothly; however, most of the clients just wait for directions and then get frustrated when they don't hear the option they need, and then call us. We are receiving a very high volume of phone calls, which is slowing up, not only doing renewals, but also Medicaid Expansion applications. Mrs. Weakley stated she sent an email to a director who is taking issues to the legislators and one of this is Medicaid Expansion and how it is affecting, as well as the Government Shutdown which is complicating things. We are paying trained benefit workers, who can work independently without a supervisor being present overtime on SNAP cases. Mrs. Weakley stated we do

see a light at the end of the tunnel; however, we do not know if it will be fast enough for the State.

Mrs. Mackie stated the sad part of this is some of these issues have been here for years. She said she did not know when the State was going to wake up. Ms. Major stated she believed they were waking up and hated it was under Director Weakley's watch. Mrs. Mackie then stated she meant to wake up and fix things instead of creating more issues.

Mrs. Weakley stated on a more positive note we had the Toy Closet and the Angel Tree Projects which we do annually. The Toy Closet provided toys for 814 children. We also did two angle trees – one provided gifts for 212 children, which included foster care children and five adopt-a-families. Our adult unit also did an angel tree at Peebles. This enabled 102 children and 103 families plus 75 adults to receive gifts. Peebles helps, Edward Jones, Broadwater Academy, Manual Episcopal Church, Eastern Star, Tangier Combined School, Market Street UMC and Grace UMC. At that time Mr. Martin stated Chincoteague normally donates toys to his Atlantic Fire Company; however, this year he received a call from Dawn Parks of the Child Welfare Unit who stated we had some toys to donate to his fire company. Mr. Martin stated he came down to get the toys and the fire company was able to help over 60 kids. Also, he said they thought Saxis Fire Company could use some toys for their area so they shared what they had with them. Mr. Martin just wanted to say thank you for thinking of them. Mrs. Weakley stated we were able to have the Toy Closet for an extra day as they received good prices for the toys and were able to assist a few additional groups.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 12 – Financial Statement – Administrative Office Manager Shirley Harmon**. Ms. Harmon stated for the month of December our Total Expenditures were \$323,664.66. Our Year-To-Date Total Local Adjustment was \$298,592.10 and our Total Local Balance to Date is \$517,706.90. Mr. Crockett stated we are below budget.

On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mrs. Mackie, the Board went into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing Adoption Assistance Agreement Case #001-054480004); Adoption Assistance Agreement Addendum (Case #21137877); Consent to Adopt (Case #14503043005); Employee Evaluation (Child Welfare Supervisor Sylvia Stanley); and Director's Consult (Evaluation/Other), as permitted by the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2.3712.

On motion by Mr. Sparkman, seconded by Mr. Martin, the Board returned to Open Session (Mr. Martin – yes; Mrs. Mackie – yes; Mr. Crockett – yes; Mr. Sparkman – yes; and Ms. Major – yes).

On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mrs. Mackie, the Board approved the following: Adoption Assistance Agreement; Adoption Assistance Agreement Addendum and Consent to Adopt (Mr. Martin – yes; Mrs. Mackie – yes; Mr. Crockett – yes; Mr. Sparkman – yes; and Ms. Major – yes):

1. Adoption Assistance Agreement #001-054480004
2. Adoption Assistance Agreement Addendum #21137877
3. Consent to Adopt: #14503043005

On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mr. Sparkman, the Employee Evaluation: Child Welfare Supervisor Sylvia Stanley was approved. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to the Director's Consult (Evaluation/Other) with staff. Ms. Major requested Mrs. Weakley to send out the EPPE to each Board Member so they can do them individually and at the February meeting comprise the results. Mrs. Weakley inquired whether the Board Members wanted to use the one they used last year or the new template. Mr. Crockett inquired whichever was easier. Mrs. Mackie stated the only difference was the wording. Mr. Crockett asked if it was easier and Mrs. Mackie stated no and they looked the same to her. At that time Mr. Crockett stated to use the form they used last year. Mrs. Weakley stated she would see the Board Members received a copy for completion prior to the February meeting.

Ms. Major stated Mr. Sparkman had previously stated he would not be in attendance at the February meeting. A short discussion followed about Mr. Sparkman having this made available for the February Board Meeting. It was finally decided he would mail same to Mr. Crockett who could present it at the next meeting.

Ms. Major stated the next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 19, 2019, at 9:30 A.M.

On motion by Mr. Crockett, seconded by Mrs. Mackie, the meeting adjourned at 11:25 A.M.

APPROVED: **Reneta Major** _____

ATTEST: **Vicki J. Weakley** _____