

The Accomack County Board of Social Services met at its facility on Tuesday, February 15, 2022, at 9:30 A.M. Present in person were Ms. Reneta Major, Chairman; Mrs. Elsie Mackie, Vice-Chairman; Mr. David Whalen; Mr. Jackie H. Phillips; Mr. Budd Martin; and Mrs. Vicki J. Weakley, Secretary.

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

Mr. Martin expressed his gratitude for the toys given to the Atlantic Fire Department by Accomack County Department of Social Services to help families within the community.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 3 - Approve Minutes of November 16, 2021, and December 21, 2021**. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Martin, to approve the Minutes 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 – Introduction of new Family Services Specialist I – Ayanna Cooper**. Mrs. Weakley introduced Ayanna Cooper as the new Family Services Specialist I. She will be filling the Family First Prevention vacancy. On behalf of the Board, Ms. Major welcomed Ms. Cooper to the agency. The Board in unison expressed the same.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 5 – Fraud Report**. No questions or concerns were raised.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 6 – Director’s Notes**. Mrs. Weakley stated that, since the last Board meeting, she attended two CPMT (Community Policy & Management Team) meetings, CPMT self-audit (the Office of Children’s Services had the agency audit itself and then they will review the self-audit), Truancy meeting, Cost allocation training, one employment interview - FSS (Family Services Specialist), Benefits Supervisors meeting, Benefits staff meeting (discussions were made of how to re-align benefits), three Network Table trainings, VLSSE (Virginia League of Social Services) Board Meeting (3 days-virtual), Director’s coffee break meeting with the State, VALSHO (Virginia Association of Local Human Services Officials) legislative conference, Healthy Communities, Realignment meeting with State DSS, and two Supervisor’s meetings.

Mrs. Weakley informed the Board of legislative proposals concerning VACMS (Virginia Case Management System) replacement, which is primarily utilized by benefits and childcare and the replacement of OASIS, which is utilized by the Child Welfare Unit. Both systems are in need of replacement. There is also legislation revolving around mental health, primarily for Child Welfare workers.

Presentations have been given to a number of legislative groups regarding mental health. Mrs. Weakley stated that she has not received a complete understanding of what the legislation entails; however, whatever begins with child welfare typically filters to the rest of the agency at some point.

The State wants to create an Adult Protective Services (APS) registry to mimic what has been appropriated for child welfare. The Child Welfare Registry is constructed so that anyone working with children is screened to discern if they have a history of abusing children. The State wants to create a similar one for adults to include persons who are self-neglecting. Agencies do not think that it is appropriate, so they are working to stop that portion from being included. Twenty-six states currently have an APS Registry.

Latency issues continue where the computer system will not work or completely shuts down, sometimes for an entire day. The next dashboard will reflect the results of that. For example, in childcare, the State will not allow an application to be closed until the 30th day. The 31st day is considered overdue and the system will not allow us to close it any day prior to the 30th day. This agency recently had a case that on the 30th day of an application someone hit a transformer in the area. The computer system shutdown for the entire day; therefore, the case became overdue. Migration of servers is also an issue in these types of cases. The State makes no allowances. Mrs. Mackie inquired about the 30th day falling on a weekend. Mrs. Weakley and Ms. Major confirmed that the case would be classified as overdue by the State.

Mrs. Weakley informed the Board that the Governor has appointed a new Commissioner, Danny Avula. Mr. Avula served for eight years on the State Board of Social Services, including two years as chair. Staff were invited to join in a virtual introductory with Mr. Avula on February 14th.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 7 – COVID Update**. Mrs. Weakley stated that COVID numbers are rising so a number of agencies have shut down for in person clients. This agency is not closed to clients at this time. The issuance of extra allotments continue. The State is carrying it over on a month-to-month basis and has not projected a time the allotments may end. There is a public awareness plan in place for whenever the decision is made to stop the extra allotments. The Public Health Emergency will continue through April. Expanded childcare coverage continues, to include the ability to pay for childcare so parents can look for work. Applications are not slowing down. Staff remain optimistic that the situation will get better.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 8 – Board Bylaws & Protocol**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the county attorney requested a copy of the Board bylaws and protocol. Through a search by the county, regional office, and board minutes dating back to the 1940s, any pre-existing bylaws and protocols were not found; therefore, Mrs. Weakley composed bylaws and protocols derived from a template. She stated that she is asking the Board to review and discuss any changes or additions. Ms. Major asked the Board if there were any comments or questions. Hearing none, Ms. Major commended Mrs. Weakley on a job well done. Mrs. Mackie made a motion, seconded by Mr. Martin, to adopt the Board Bylaws & Protocol as written. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 9 – Purge – Position Postings; Foster Care Case; Benefits Records; CSA Financial Records; Automotive Accident File**. Mrs. Weakley stated that 262 CSA cases, an agency car accident file, a foster care case, position postings, and 150 benefit cases are ready to be purged according to State guidelines. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whalen, that the cases, collectively, be purged. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 10 – Christmas Projects**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the toy closet did a brisk business and stated by Mr. Martin earlier, some of the toys left over went to the fire department for them to distribute in the community. Two hundred and fifty-nine children (97 families) were served through the toy closet. Over the years, the toy closet became better organized and not as chaotic as it was in the past. With COVID, clients were scheduled for specific times to come in and it has proven to work best. One hundred and twenty children were served through the angel tree program from community organizations and businesses and one hundred and eleven children were served through another angel tree project.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 11 – Benefits Appreciation Month**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the Commonwealth of Virginia has recognized the month of February 2022 as Benefit Programs Specialist Appreciation month. In recognition, the agency provides lunch for each benefit worker. Staff decide among themselves where they would like to go for lunch. Last year, they had a virtual lunch and everyone received a \$20.00 Subway gift card to purchase their lunch.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 12 – Review of Ethical Behavior favors, gifts, or consideration**. Mrs. Weakley stated that she included in the Board packet a thirty-six year old version and a proposed version of the Ethical Behavior policy for comparison. The proposed changes are that monetary gifts could be accepted from a client of no greater than \$10.00 and be approved by the worker's supervisor. The gifts in question are, most of the time, gifts that are handmade and often from elderly clients who are not used to receiving handouts and they want to make a contribution of some kind. The current policy has an impact on the client when they hear, "sorry I can't accept that." Another group a gift may come from are foster children. Again, most times, it is something that they have made or gone to the dollar store to pick up and they do not understand if they are told, "I can't accept that." The proposed change to be able to accept a small token from clients who wish to show appreciation and to protect the self-esteem of the

client by making them feel as though they have made a contribution to the resolution of a problem and not just receiving a “hand-out.” Workers, under no circumstances, may ask for gifts or favors and items are not to be purchased from clients. Mrs. Mackie stated that she thinks it is a wonderful idea based on her experience of having to reject a crocheted pin from an elderly client and how badly she felt telling the client that she could not accept it. Ms. Major concurred with Mrs. Mackie. Mrs. Mackie made a motion, seconded by Mr. Phillips, to accept the proposed changes to the Ethical Behavior Policy as written. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 13 – Agency Profile**. Mrs. Weakley stated that she would review the highlights of the Local Department of Social Services Profile Report, SFY 2021. On page 1, the number of people living in poverty went up by 65 people in the past year. This has increased by 1% as the percent of people living in poverty was 17% last year. The number of children living in poverty has lowered. Last year it was 26% and this year it is 24%. The next three pages are identical to last year’s report and it is not clear why it has not been updated. On page 6, residents who received benefits was 12,593. This number has increased by 502. The number of TANF clients decreased by 22 cases, SNAP has increased by 200 cases, and Medicaid has increased by 448 cases. The increase of residents who received benefits, are some individuals which received SNAP and Medicaid; therefore, those cases would be counted as one case. On page 7, the referrals in Child Protective Services has increased by 30 children from last year. Adult Protective Services has decreased by 55 cases. On page 9, the unfilled positions at this agency are at 14%; across the state, it is 16%. The report received last week indicates the agency’s vacancy rate is now at 17%. Mrs. Mackie inquired about the difference in direct and indirect. Mrs. Weakley responded that direct means a worker is actually working with the client. Indirect means support staff.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 14 – Realignment**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the Comp Plan the Board approved on April 20, 2021, included the possibility of a salary realignment for staff. This study looks at all salaries and determines if a worker should be given an increase, based on their years of experience. At the time the Comp Plan was approved, the Board requested that before a realignment was conducted that it be brought back before the Board and receive a second approval.

When the raising to the minimum occurred on July 1, 2021, a number of new employees were raised to the new level and are now very close in salary to those who have been employed for a number of years. This has created ill feelings. Some employees who have resigned have given this as a reason for their departure. It was hoped that the State would do something this year in terms of balancing it out. There was discussion of possibly giving employees \$100.00 for each year of service for those not affected by the raise to minimums, but that was not in the budget. There is discussion now about a 5% raise for 2022 and 2023, but that would include everyone across the board. Ms. Linton and Mrs. Weakley met virtually with State staff last week and discovered that Mrs. Weakley will have to prepare all of the documentation for each employee. As part of the justification for the realignment, all employees must be included for comparison. A salary worksheet, which will include experience with DSS and previous employers, will calculate the salary range of where an employee should be and how much of a disparity there is from their current salary. The State will not allow more than a 10% raise regardless of the recommended calculation. Should the realignment indicate every employee should receive a 10% increase and the budget will not support it, smaller increases can be given. The calculations could be that some employees should be increased to 3% and another to 5%. It is hoped that the calculation will bring employees closer to where they should be and create separation between the newest employees and the employees with greater experience. Mrs. Weakley asked permission to proceed with the realignment. Ms. Major asked when the last realignment took place. Mrs. Weakley stated that it was before her time of 5 years here. Mrs. Mackie and Dawn Parks, Administrative Coordinator, expressed that last occurred around 2005-2006. Ms. Major stated that she thought it had been quite a long time since Accomack DSS had done a realignment. Mrs. Major stated that it is warranted that Accomack DSS do a realignment. Morale is down around the State and anything we can do to keep good people within the agency is necessary. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Mackie, that the Board authorize Mrs. Weakley

to do the study for the realignment. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 15 – Financial Statement – Administrative Office Manager – Wendy Linton**. Mrs. Linton stated the previous Local Budget was \$816,299.00. After the County approved the raise to the minimums, the insurance, and allocations, the budget was increased by \$45,244.00. The Local Budget is now \$861,543.00. The Year-To-Date Local Expenditures is \$384, 413.63 and the Total Local Balance-To-Date is \$477,129.37. Ms. Major stated that everything looks good. Ms. Linton added that the State asked for a calculation foreseeing the 5% raise passes. The County’s part would be a little less than \$20,000.00 for its 15.5%.

Ms. Major inquired, with the realignment, will the County need to be asked for additional funds or would it be afforded out of the agency’s own budget. Ms. Linton stated that it would be afforded out of the agency’s own budget. Funding is available through the State that would pay a portion as long as the agency’s budget can contribute the locality portion.

Closed Session - On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, the Board went into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing Board Acceptance – Foster Care (Case #20792830, #21193729, #21192057), Finalized Adoption (Case #21187632, #21186031), Employee Separations: Alex Cruz, Camesha White, Kathy Mason (retirement), and April Graham (retirement), EPPE: Wendy Linton, Michelle Hart, Sylvia Stanley, Rudy Zavala, and Dawn Parks, Director’s Consult, Director’s EPPE – due in March, and Director’s time off as permitted by the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2.3712.

On motion by Mr. Phillips, 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 (Mrs. Mackie – yes; Mr. Whalen – yes; Mr. Martin – yes; Mr. Phillips – yes; Ms. Major – yes). The motion has carried.

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

Mrs. Mackie made a motion, seconded by Mr. Phillips, that the Board accept the employee separations. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Mr. Whalen made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Mackie, that the Board accept the EPPE’s presented. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at 9:30 A.M.

On motion by Mr. Martin seconded by Mr. Whalen, the meeting adjourned at 10:39 A.M.

APPROVED: **Cassandra Reneta Major** _____

ATTEST: **Vicki Weakley** _____