

The Accomack County Board of Social Services met at its facility on Tuesday, May 16, 2023, 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; and Vicki Weakley, Secretary.

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

Ms. Major continued to **Item 3 – Approve Minutes of April 18, 2023**. Mr. Phillips noted a correction of the meeting time to change from 9:00 A.M. to 9:30 A.M. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whalen, to approve the Minutes with the noted change. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 4 – Fraud Report**. No questions or concerns were raised.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 5 – Director’s Notes**. Mrs. Weakley stated that, since the last meeting, she attended Comp Plan training, CPMT (Community Planning and Management Team) meeting, a Sub-recipient Audit review in benefits (The agency did well. There were no financial or policy errors; however, documentation needs improvement. The auditors expect that when a case is reviewed they will be able to follow the case fully through the documentation. Part of the issue stems from the caseload volume and how much time is needed for each case to be well documented. A documentation template, that was created in the past, is being implemented again to help with guidance in what information should be documented and why that information is critical.), two Truancy meetings, an employee interview (to be discussed in closed session), the Virginia League of Social Services Executives (VLSSE) conference in Staunton (The State continues to discuss the possibility of replacing VACMS. Mrs. Weakley expressed great concern that the last time a major computer program was replaced the agency had a mass exit of employees which was also seen across the state. Funding is an issue at this time to change the program. The hope is, that discussions with the Commissioner will lead to agencies being able to talk about what is needed and what is not working with the old system (VACMS) so that the new system will have those corrections implemented before it goes live to the localities. For example, some items that used to take a benefits worker twenty minutes to complete, now takes the worker an hour and twenty minutes to complete on the current system. The biggest concern is about turnover and how many vacancies there already are across the state and the difficulty in getting applications for the positions. There are a variety of reasons for that; one is stress. There has also been discussion about secondary trauma that workers experience listening to traumatizing situations all day. Generally, when a worker resigns, they state that stress and salary are the reason they are parting ways. There are localities, we are not one of them, which are able to start an employee out significantly above what the State considers as a minimum. Right now, the minimum salary for a Benefits Program Specialist \$32,415 and for a Family Services Specialist, who is required to have a bachelor’s degree, is \$36,993. These figures are at least a 15-20% increase from what it was five years ago. It is not within the budget to be able to afford counteroffers when an employee has been offered another job especially at a much higher salary. The average Family Services Specialist leaves the field after two years. It costs the agency \$22,000 if they leave within the first year because of the required training. In January 2020, 683,541 Virginian’s received SNAP benefits. By January 2023, that number increased to 913,675. The number of positions we have been allocated has not increased. Staff are taking on extra work and Medicaid unwinding has increased the workload. The State is giving workers overtime pay. The only offer we can give is comp time. Typically, when the localities have requested additional funding to cover additional staff the State has denied the request. Neither the State nor Federal has been willing to give us additional funding.)

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 6 - COVID Update**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the agency is receiving overtime funds for the Medicaid unwinding. The State is sending reminders not to work ahead of the list of cases being sent by the State. Only 1/12th can be processed each month. Mrs. Mackie inquired if the workers are finding that they are able

to close any Medicaid cases. Mrs. Weakley stated, surprisingly, no. The anticipation was that a lot of cases could be closed. The last memo stated that most cases are closing because the person moved out of state, passed away, or the client is calling to ask that the case be closed, which is not what was expected when the cases began to be reviewed. It does not look like, after this is over with, that the caseload size will have decreased. The three reasons the State would allow us to close a case during the pandemic are the only reasons the majority of them seem to be closing now. Some cases are closing because of income, but there are not many of them. The State continues to allow the interview waiver while Medicaid cases are being processed due to the time constraints.

The SNAP work requirement will be forthcoming. The agency was previously exempted because of the level of poverty in Accomack County. The State removed that exemption just before the pandemic and then all agencies were exempted. There is an uncertainty if the agency will be exempt until an announcement on July 1, 2023.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 7 – Adult Abuse Prevention Month & Item 8 – Foster Care Month**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the items placed in front of board members are for Foster Care Awareness Month and Adult Abuse Prevention Month. On the Foster Care Awareness sheet, there is a featured article on Hope Tree Family Services worker, S. Anderson, who was a former foster child of Accomack County. Not only did she do well, but she is also helping other foster children do the same. The agency is very proud of her.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 9 – Agency Profile**. Mrs. Weakley stated that on page 4 of the Agency Profile, at the bottom, the Adult Protective Services information has been removed. There were 251 Child Protective Services complaints received last year. The year prior, there were 366 complaints. On page 7 there is a comparison from 2018 – 2022 regarding households and the benefit programs. Fuel and crisis numbers have decreased; cooling numbers have increased. The number of SNAP households have increased; the number of TANF cases has decreased. Medicaid has significantly increased due to the Medicaid expansion for those who are working but not making enough to afford medical insurance. On page 9, there is a notation that 13,810 residents in Accomack County received SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid. On page 13 there are statistics on the poverty rate. According to this, it has decreased since 2014. At the bottom of the page, 16% of Accomack County residents live in poverty and 1,725 children are living in poverty for a total of 26%. On page 11, the ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) pie chart identifies people who are underemployed and just above the poverty line, generally referred to as one pay check from disaster. Combining the number of people in poverty and the number of people shown in the ALICE pie chart, 50% of the population in Accomack County are in poverty.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 10 – Comp Plan**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the following changes have been made to the Comp Plan:

Section IV State & Local Increases (A) State Supported Local Increase (COLA): is checked yes for the salary increase for state supported employees as outlined in the annual budget of 5-7% effective July 1, 2023.

Section VI: Supplemental Pay (A) On-Call Compensation is checked yes to provide on-call compensation. Last year's Comp Plan stated that the agency would compensate at a rate of \$20.00 per 8-hour shift. It now states \$12.50. A conversation with staff gave them the option of leaving it at \$20.00 and only Child Welfare staff would be on-call to take both CPS and APS complaints or split the amount between both and the amount could increase to \$12.50. This would allow for Child Welfare and Adult Protective Services (APS) to be on-call so that Child Welfare would not have to take an adult case and, APS would not have to take a CPS case. This is the option they chose. (B) Pay or Leave for Social Work Performed While On-Call Duty (3) previously stated that the agency would provide special duty leave for each hour actually worked while on-call changed to exercise either of the above options on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Phillips made a motion to approve the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) Compensation Plan 2023-2024 with the changes made, seconded by Mrs. Mackie. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 11 – Financial Statement – Administrative Office Manager – Wendy Linton**. Ms. Linton stated that the beginning budget was \$864,543.00. The Year-To-Date Local Expenditures were \$528,985.41, and the Total Local Balance-To- Date is \$335,557.59. At this time, the budget is running about 17% below. Ms. Linton stated that remaining funds will be used as there is an allowance to use the funds through the months of June and July.

Closed Session - On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, the Board went into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing items stated on the Agenda (Consent to Adoption – Hernandez and Daley, employee interview, and Director’s Consult) as permitted by the Code of Virginia, Section 2.2.3712. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, 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. Phillips – yes; Ms. Major – yes). The motion carried.

Mrs. Mackie made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whalen, that the Board accept the Consent to Adoption of Hernandez and Daley. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 20, 2023, at 9:30 A.M. Ms. Major stated that she would not be present for the June meeting.

On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, the meeting adjourned at 10:55 A.M.

APPROVED: **Cassandra Reneta Major**

ATTEST: **Vicki Weakley**