

The Accomack County Board of Social Services met at its facility on Tuesday, November 21, 2023, at 9:30 A.M. Present in person were Ms. Reneta Major, Chairman; Mrs. Elsie Mackie, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Robert Martin; Mr. David Whalen; Mr. Jackie H. Phillips; and Vicki Weakley, Secretary.

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

Ms. Major continued to **Item 3 – Approve Minutes of October 17, 2023**. Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whalen, 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 – Fraud Report**. No questions or concerns were raised.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 5 – Director’s Notes**. Mrs. Weakley stated that since the last meeting, she attended a Discrimination/implicit bias legal training (this is a training for all employees once a year), Ms. Linton and Mrs. Weakley attended the HR training (FMLA, ADA, etc.), Commissioner call, virtual VLSSE (Virginia League of Social Services Executives) meeting (There was a lot of discussion about the formula they use to decide how much funding the State will give each agency. The State entertains four different formulas and every formula cuts our budget. The League has stated that the plan is to keep any agency’s budget the same even if the formula shows that it should be cut.), staff interview for clerical (the person who was hired will begin December 1, 2023), Virtual Personnel Committee meeting, Fall Director’s conference held in Lynchburg (VLSSE), CPMT (Community Planning and Management Team) meeting, Mrs. Parks and Mrs. Weakley met with Value Carpet One (they will begin laying the remaining carpet in January 2024), Doughnut meet and greet for staff, and a Supervisor’s meeting. Staff enjoyed a Halloween covered dish luncheon in which Mrs. Weakley was unable to attend due to her attendance at the conference.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 6 – Comp Plan Update**. Mrs. Weakley stated that she needs the Board’s approval for the half percent to be added to the Comp Plan based on the Governor’s recommendation. A six and a half percent raise was based on the County and the State is giving the funds for the half percent for the raise to move up to seven percent.

Mr. Phillips made a motion, seconded by Mr. Whalen, to approve that the half percent be reflected in the Comp Plan. Hearing no discussion, Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 7 – Back to School Project Information – Child Welfare**. Mrs. Weakley stated that reports were made previously on families that were helped for the Back to School Project, this is an additional report. Backpacks and school supplies were purchased for 65 children for a total of 33 families. The Salvation Army assisted with purchasing clothing for 22 families in the amount of \$2,895.00.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 8 – Medicaid Unwinding**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the agency receives a monthly indicator report and, so the Board could get an idea going forward. Mrs. Weakley will let the Board know each month how many over-due Medicaid reviews the agency has as a result of not being allowed to process them during COVID. Processing the over-due Medicaid cases began in May 2023 and the federal government expects that all cases will have been reviewed by May 2024. Mrs. Weakley stated that she is receiving strong messages from the federal government that there will be severe consequences if the reviews are not completed by May 2024. The reports are always behind, but at the end of August this agency has 6,076 cases remaining to be processed. Most of those cases are in the adult unit which is the unit that handles single adults, long-term care, handicap adults, and anyone in an assisted living facility. The Eastern Shore does not have any assisted living facilities, but if someone is approved and goes to a facility somewhere in the state of Virginia, the community from which their case originated maintains that case for payment. This agency maintains a few of those cases. Unfortunately, the unit that is getting the brunt of these cases currently has three

vacancies and another resignation was just received. This means that the three senior workers and the supervisory backup are doing the bulk of the work. That unit has two workers who have been employed just over a year, but not taking full cases loads yet because of the complicated nature of the work and the time it takes to process cases rapidly. Therefore, it will be a challenge to complete the 6,076 overdue cases by May 2024.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 9 – SNAP work requirement**. Mrs. Weakley stated that the ABAWD (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents) policy, in which clients are only eligible for SNAP benefits for three months, from the State has an expectation that during the three months, the client will look for work. Ms. Major inquired about the age limit. Mrs. Weakley stated that it is being changed, but as of September, individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 are eligible. Effective October 1st, it changed to individual age 18 to 52. October 2024 it will change to individuals 18 to 54. There are three exemptions which are anyone who is homeless, a United States veteran, or someone who is age 24 or younger and who was in foster care on their 18th birthday. This policy has been in place for at least 30 years. Accomack has been exempt from this policy based on the level of poverty in the area; however, just before COVID, the State removed the exemption. There were roughly twenty to thirty agencies that received the exemption. Due to COVID, the policy stayed in place for everyone. Three months ago, the exemption was removed. We are now seeing the first group of people who are being affected by this policy. The client is offered the opportunity to work with a VIEW (Virginia Initiative for Education and Welfare) worker to help them find employment. To date, not one client has taken the offer. The workers are receiving calls from angry clients demanding that something has been done wrong. The clients are appealing and unfortunately the brunt of all of this is falling on the same unit that has all the vacancies and the Medicaid unwinding on them. Even though it is State policy and there is nothing to appeal, the worker still has to prepare all of the appeal paperwork, which is not small, and justify everything they have done and reference the policies that they followed. Then, an appointment is made with the client and the appeal's officer which is generally done by phone, but it is another block of time from the worker's schedule. Mr. Martin asked for clarification that the public knew this was coming. Mrs. Weakley stated, yes, it was announced. As is typical, the clients do not pay full attention or they do not think that it applies to them. When it does apply to them, they will claim that it is not fair. A great deal of the appeal work is being done by the workers who are not carrying full caseloads. Mrs. Weakley asked Mrs. Mackie if she remembered how many pages were in an appeal. Mrs. Mackie stated that there is a letter to the client and then about six more pages depending on how much detail is put in by the worker to describe their process and the site policy used. Mrs. Mackie continued to say that the worker needs a form where they can just fill in the information of what happened, but that's not how it works, and then the policy manual tells the worker what has to be put in. Mr. Phillips inquired how many of those the worker deals with like that. Mrs. Weakley said she is unsure how to answer that, but a worker that she spoke with yesterday had just received three of them. Mrs. Mackie added that after all the paperwork; a lot of the clients will not appear for the appeal. Mr. Phillips asked if any of the cases were overturned. Mrs. Weakley stated, yes. The supervisor has to review it and if he sees something the worker did incorrectly, miscalculated, or overlooked he will contact the client, fix the problem, and the client can withdraw the appeal. When a client is appealing the ABWAD policy, there is nothing that can reroute the appeal because we cannot change policy. Sometimes the supervisor will try to talk with the client and explain the ABWAD policy. During the appeal process clients will continue to receive their benefits even though they may have to pay them back. That doesn't seem to be a concern to the client. The appeals are causing stress and anxiety for the new workers who immediately think that they may have done something wrong, but they haven't. Mrs. Weakley continued that she and the supervisor are talking to the workers and explaining that it is not personal and if they did do something wrong, the supervisor will catch it during their review and fix it. Mrs. Mackie inquired how the public knows about the ABWAD program and if it was still mandatory that the client come in to speak with a VIEW worker after they were approved so the VIEW worker could explain the program. Mrs. Weakley replied that the State sent out notices regarding the ABWAD. Part of what has happened is there used to be the FSET (Food Stamp Employment and Training) program and it was mandatory that clients be involved in the program. It was a

good program in that it offered people some guidance and assistance in trying to get employment. Unfortunately, the State put a miniscule amount of funds in the program where we were only allowed to spend \$25.00 a month on a client. There is not a whole lot you can do for \$25.00 a month. In most cases, the only thing we could do is to buy them a bus pass until the bus pass went up to \$30.00. We could not even pay for a GED test because that was \$35.00. Most of the things you could do for a VIEW client were not accessible for the clients receiving SNAP. At some point, the State decided to make the FSET program non-mandatory. Agencies didn't even have to run it. Ms. Major stated that in her thirty plus years with Northampton County Department of Social Services, she has never heard of the FSET program. Mrs. Mackie stated that her concern, right now, is do clients realize that this is going to happen. If it is written on the notice that the benefits have been approved, they are not going to continue reading the remainder of the notice. Mrs. Mackie suggested that the worker highlight the ABWAD statement. Mrs. Weakley stated, even though the client has signed a form that states they know that they have to do the ABWAD. Mrs. Weakley stated the client is told in the beginning and then, about half way through the three months, it is required that the worker reach out to them again and offer the services of the VIEW program, but it's on a voluntary bases. The clients will not volunteer. Mrs. Mackie inquired if a client goes for services, they are accepted and they do what the VIEW worker says during that period of time, will that extend their benefits. Mrs. Weakley stated, no. Mrs. Mackie stated that there was no initiative to participate. Mrs. Weakley stated that it is happening across the state particularly where the programs have no funding attached to them.

Ms. Major continued to **Item 10 – Overdue Nursing Home Screenings**. Mrs. Weakley stated that she wanted to make the Board aware that the Adult Protective Services Unit is required to do nursing home screenings. They do not screen for children in nursing homes because the State allowed this agency to opt out of that service. The APS worker will always go out to the nursing home with a nurse from the Accomack County Health Department as the assessment is split in half and on one single document. When completed by both, the assessment comes back to social services. The health department is so short staffed and not completing their portion within the required timeframe allotted by the State. Although this agency has no control over that it still comes back as a negative towards this agency. Multiple conversations have occurred with the health department to try to come up with a solution or an alternative. Efforts have been made where the APS worker will make the appointment, go to the health department and pick up the nurse, and make several appointments at a time so it is less disruptive on everyone's schedule. Nothing has changed and up until this point, the agency has had a perfect record on nursing home screenings. Ms. Major inquired if the health department is the only department that can be used. Mrs. Weakley replied, yes, because any other agency that provides a service would be considered a conflict of interest. Mr. Phillips inquired how it is determined who receives the screening. Mrs. Weakley stated that the person themselves or a relative is requesting the screening and it could be the nursing home that tells them what to do or the doctor. They call the APS screener and the screener explains the process that they have to be Medicaid eligible. If they are not Medicaid eligible, it is explained how to receive Medicaid, and an appointment will be made for the screening. For a while, there were specific days that the health department would make themselves available. There was a screener for Northampton and a screener for Accomack. Now, because they are so short staffed, there is one screener for both counties.

Ms. Major proceeded to **Item 11 – Financial Statement**. Mrs. Weakley asked if anyone had any questions. The local budget was \$944,084.00. The Year-To-Date Local Expenditures were \$275,244.12, and the Total Local Balance-To-Date is \$688,839.88. No questions or concerns were raised.

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 (Acceptance of custody #21224354 & #21143014, Employee Separation – Antron Stratton, 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 Mrs. Mackie, 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. Martin – yes; Mr. Whalen – yes; Mr. Phillips – yes; Ms. Major – yes). The motion carried.

On motion by Mr. Phillips, seconded by Mr. Whalen, the Board accept custody cases #21224354 & #21143014. Ms. Major called a vote for all in favor to signify by Aye. The motion carried.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 19, 2023, at 9:30 A.M.

Mr. Phillips wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Mackie, to adjourn the meeting at 10:52 A.M.

APPROVED: **Cassandra Reneta Major**

ATTEST: **Vicki Weakley**