



Georgia Department of Human Services
Aging Services | Child Support Services | Family & Children Services

**BOARD OF HUMAN SERVICES
MEETING MINUTES**

**August 17, 2022
12:46 p.m. - 1:25 p.m.
Atlanta, GA**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Robertiena Fletcher, Chair
Randall Smith, Vice Chair
Monica Walters, Secretary
David Barbee
Lisa Hamilton
Scott Johnson
Wes Lewis
Jack F. Williams

MEMBERS ABSENT

Rochard D. White

Also present, Commissioner Candice L. Broce.

Chair Robertiena Fletcher called the Board of Human Services meeting to order at 12:46 p.m. on August 17, 2022. Jackie Tate provided an attendance for members attended in person and members who were attending virtually. Jackie Tate advised there was a quorum.

APPROVAL OF June 22, 2022, BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Chair Fletcher called for a motion to approve the Board meeting minutes for June 22, 2022. A motion was presented by David Barbee and seconded by Randall Smith to approve the Board meeting minutes for June 22, 2022. There being no further discussion, the motion unanimously passed.

ACTION ITEMS

Chair Fletcher called for a motion to consider the resolution to surplus the custody of real property in Bacon County. Monica Walters read the motion and moved to approve the resolution. Dave Barbee seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Fletcher called for a motion to approve the recommendations for the budget. Randy Smith moved to approve the proposed DHS budgets for Amended Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 and Dave Barbee seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Candice Broce began her report by acknowledging the great work the Department is doing across the divisions with technology and staffing efforts despite COVID, and other challenges the agency faces.

Commissioner Broce then began addressing questions that were received concerning Medicaid redeterminations. Commissioner Broce explained that DHS DFCS OFI determines eligibility for several federal benefit programs and state-run programs. She explained DHS DFCS OFI determines eligibility on behalf of the Department of Community Health as this relates to Medicaid. She advised the federal government declared a public health emergency (PHE) and established federal law that continued Medicaid for everyone who was on the program without requiring redetermination for eligibility during the PHE. As a result, caseloads have increased because we are not checking for their regular eligibility checks.

However, once the PHE expires, our staff will be required to redetermine eligibility for approximately 2.4 to 2.6 million cases for individuals who are on Medicaid, which is a massive undertaking. States are grappling to ready themselves, making changes to their systems, automating as much as allowable, shoring up staffing, etc. However, there are staffing challenges everywhere. In terms of volume, we would move from caseloads of 10s of thousands of cases per worker to over 100,000 cases per worker per month and we cannot hire our way out of what is expected when the PHE expires.

The question of when the PHE will expire was posed (R. Smith). Commissioner Broce advised that we do not know; but we know the current term is slated to expire October 13th, and if the federal government was going to let it expire, we would have received notification a few days ago. She advised the term can only be extended for a maximum of 90 days at a time, but it is believed it will be extended for 90 days through the end of the year or until after the general election cycle. It is anticipated the redeterminations will start at the beginning of the new calendar year.

In preparation, the Department is phasing in more office locations for in-person services, working to encourage customers to update their information in the system and opt-in for paperless notifications, and making changes in Georgia Gateway to better manage the process workflow for staff and the customer experience. The other big component is the Department is working with Jackson Spalding to launch a massive public relations campaign to ensure that every Georgian across the state will be aware of Medicaid redeterminations and their options. She advised DHS is buying radio and T.V. ads and will also utilize social media to ensure everyone is aware that they should

update their information and their Medicaid eligibility is going to be reviewed so they should start thinking about their options before the PHE expires.

Over the next few months DHS will phase into utilizing all the options. DHS is also working with multiple state agencies because others will also be affected. If someone does lose Medicaid coverage, we want them to know what their options are and be able to smoothly transition into the private marketplace. Commissioner Broce stressed she believes we are in a good spot despite all the challenges with hiring and other things.

A question was posed about securing a vendor for the redetermination process (S. Johnson). Commissioner Broce advised DHS is working with several vendors and working through Deloitte, which is the company that built Gateway and manages it, to pay for system enhancements for automated case reviews, so that if based on everything we know - through the 47 government databases that we can leverage - nothing about the customer's eligibility information has changed, it can be a touchless process where we are allowed to go ahead and renew their eligibility and we will not need to interact with the customer. We are also looking at buying "bots" for automation as well as a second technology module whose vendor is out for bid so we can better communicate with our customers through texting, uploading/downloading information, allowing appeals for initial denials. We want to really leverage technology for communicating with our customers.

A question concerning our knowledge of the federal government's tracking of their share of Medicaid funding and whether our cost share will go up in the future was posed (D. Barbee). Commissioner Broce responded that she understands that immediately upon the PHE expiration and when states begin to process redeterminations, the state will lose the enhanced FMAP, which is a huge pain point for states because the states will still have individuals on Medicaid who are no longer eligible for the enhanced rate.

Another question was posed regarding how this will be offset. Melody DeBussey responded that we will receive the enhanced rate through the quarter year in which the PHE ends. She also stated that the FMAP rates have been published for the upcoming fiscal year with changes based on the standards related to the socio-economic status and Georgia's FMAP rates are going down. As a result, DHS will need to think strategically and intentionally about how we restructure our team to leverage all the federal dollars to ensure we have adequate funding.

Matthew Krull advised that Georgia's FMAP funding is 66.02% so that means for every dollar spent, the federal government pays 66.02 cents on regular Medicaid. Also, when considering CHIP (Peachcare for Kids), it is actually a higher rate the federal government pays. He also stated a provision of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) required that states who accepted the enhanced funding did not remove anyone from Medicaid during the PHE and reiterated the enhanced funding will

end when the PHE expires. He advised this is really a Department of Community Health (DCH) budget issue.

Commissioner Broce reiterated that we are in a good place in terms of planning and stated we have had support from the Governor's Office and the Office of Planning and Budget. She then moved on to talk about how DCH contracts with managed care Medicaid companies to administer several programs. As it relates to DHS, DCH contracts with Amerigroup to administer the Georgia Families 360 health care plan for children in foster care, on adoption assistance and children in the Department of Juvenile Justice's custody. The contract is due to expire in June 2024 so DCH is soliciting feedback from stakeholders who know or have dealt with the Amerigroup contract to learn what the state should consider when looking at other contract options. DHS has responded to the Request for Information so that we can make known some of the pain points for the care of children in our custody, opportunities for improvement and offer ideas on what a future contract should look like in a different model than what we currently have because children in foster care, receiving adoption assistance or in DJJ's custody do not fit in the traditional actuarial models when it comes to health care. We will continue to work with DCH and offer ideas and our experience as the boots on the ground trying to coordinate care for these children and young adults.

What has been immensely helpful for our formal response was that shortly after Commissioner Broce moved into the DFCS role, but before she moved into the dual role as commissioner, DHS developed a process with Mary Havick at the helm of each week gathering case specific examples of children who were having issues navigating health care (e.g., a child in care who desperately needs braces and we cannot find an orthodontist, or a child who needs crisis level psychiatric treatment and we cannot find a placement for him.) DHS compiled those cases from every DFCS county office and was able to use concrete examples in the response to DCH regarding the health care plan and provide examples of when children would have gone without services if there had not been intervention or if DHS had not paid directly for the care with state funds until we were able to reconcile it later. Another big part of that is DHS hired Matthew Krull as our first Medicaid attorney, and now we have expanded the team to have four attorneys who can appeal the denials from Amerigroup where a child has been denied certain treatment on the grounds of medical necessity. We are now in the process of acquiring the fourth Medicaid attorney. These attorneys have read the contract and know the terms that we now leverage to obtain services, which is proving to be wildly successful.

She then provided an example of a teenaged girl who desperately needed residential psychiatric care for 90 days and was only approved for 60 days which would not have been adequate. Through these attorneys, we appealed the denial and based on the terms in the contract, we are able to request that Amerigroup continues to pay for the benefit until we are able to resolve the dispute. We ultimately won the dispute and the child was able to obtain the services.

Two days ago, the Governor and First Lady announced that they would provide \$350 in economic assistance payments to every Georgian who was enrolled on

Medicaid, SNAP or TANF as of July 31, 2022. This will be a billion dollars in payments to help these families with whatever pressing needs they have. DHS is working with the Governor's office and the Office of Planning and Budget to make sure we are ready to deploy the funds. The fastest way to get the payment is for the customer to have an active email on file with us, which we will encourage, and this will also be wonderful when we do the Medicaid redeterminations.

The question was posed if these are federal dollars and Commissioner Broce responded these are federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan. Commissioner Broce then pivoted into discussing child welfare and the data/graphs Mary Havick discussed. She stated that one of the graphs showed since 2020 we have not had as many adoptions. Although it didn't fall off dramatically, it hasn't increased dramatically either as we slowly move out of the pandemic. When talking about a child in foster care and whether the plan is for reunification or an alternative permanency plan like adoption, the effect of COVID on the court system was incredibly dramatic. Some of the court systems were paused, and although some of the courts were operating virtually, this is not the option you want to pursue for terminating parental rights - this is a proceeding to hold in-person because it is so important to the family unit. As a result, we have more children who should no longer be in foster care or, at the least, we should be having more periodic reviews of their cases, and we need to get caught up. The workforce issue is not specific to DFCS, it also involves the court system and all the attorneys who in private practice represent the state.

One good development that came out of the budget requires the juvenile court judges to work with the Department to develop a process for more timely court hearings and working through the backlog to access a salary supplement that was put in the budget. It has taken a couple of weeks to negotiate an interview with the Council of Juvenile Court Judges and we think that over the next year we are going to see some great numbers in children being reunified with their families or move into adoption and working through the Covid backlog. That will be very exciting when we look at the numbers in 12 months from now when we can look at that data.

Mary Havick talked about the foster parent recruitment effort and the foster parent survey that we are going to do. And, although we know that we need more foster families, we are also getting the support we need to get more, which is wonderful. She wrapped up the report by advising that last year we decided to leverage some flexibility in addressing children who are hoteling because there is not a suitable placement for the child/teenager.

A question was posed about their ages (R. Smith). Commissioner Broce explained the ages vary because the need to temporarily place the child in a hotel or in a DFCS office under the supervision of staff and other supports and the need for hoteling has to do with the circumstance of the child, e.g., medical needs, behavioral challenges, pending delinquency case, or teenagers make the potential need for hoteling substantially higher until a placement can be found. In July of last year there were 50-60 kids being hoteling across the state on any given night. Then we

implemented flexible enhanced rates and other strategies to see what would work. Then we found that around Thanksgiving we got the numbers down to 40 or a little below, which is remarkable. Then going into the calendar year, it went back up and then fluctuated. However, a few days ago, we found out there were no foster children/youth in hotels for Dekalb or Fulton counties and it's been a long time since that occurred.

Comments were made and the question of what happened was posed (S. Johnson, R. Smith.) Commissioner Broce clarified that we still have one but there is a placement on the horizon. Also today, we learned that we have broken the DFCS record as far as our records go back for the lowest number of children being hoteled across the state by reducing the number into the 20s, which is remarkable and shows how hard we are working. She expressed how amazing this is and she believes we will keep driving down the number to the goal of 0.

Compliments were given and the question was posed of what it was that finally worked (S. Johnson, R. Smith) Commissioner Broce advised that we decided that we could not cap the amount that has to be negotiated to meet the placement needs for a child who is in our care. She advised that, in reality, we are probably saving money when considering the amount of money spent on hoteling each night. She stressed that it not all about the money, but we work to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the child in services, placement setting, etc. She also advised that we dedicated an experienced employee, Audrey Brannon, to the role of coordinating complex placements for these children. Comments on the importance of ensuring we are doing this were made and gratitude was expressed. Commissioner advised that our providers have stepped up to really help also.

A question was posed regarding our preparation for more children coming into care as a result of the Supreme Court's overturn of Roe. vs. Wade (R. Smith). Commissioner Broce responded that we have been working hard to prepare for this and advised the "Heartbeat" bill also directly impacts our agency. She advised that outside of foster care, women can now collect the expenses for the pregnancy and medical expenses incurred through the pregnancy from the father and that is something we can foster through our Division of Child Support Services. We have been providing guidance to our staff and trying to find ways to help customers document the information and in foster care, we are also actively recruiting to recruit and retain loving foster homes. In the Office of Family Independence, we are still emphasizing independence, but also ensuring the families who eligible and need the support are able to obtain it. With the recent changes in federal law that allows us to draw down more federal funding for preventative services, that will be key in strengthening families so that their children will not have to come into foster care. This will give us a lot more flexibility in surrounding these families with support to mitigate the vulnerabilities in their lives. One other thing, as a result of the federal funding, we can double the funds that we give to Public Health for contraceptives across the state, and that will also help.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Chair Fletcher concluded the meeting complimenting leadership on the work of the Department. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Board of Human Services is scheduled for Wednesday, November 9, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,


Monica Walters, Secretary

APPROVED:


Robertiena Fletcher, Chair