

**MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF HUMAN SERVICES
HELD
March 21, 2012**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tiena Fletcher, Chair
Monica Walters, Secretary
Lisa Alexander
Scott Johnson
Randy Smith
Ann White
Jack Williams

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Frank Auman
Sandra Smith

Ms. Tiena Fletcher, Chair, called the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Board meeting to order at 2:20 p.m., March 21, 2012 and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the January 18, 2012 meeting be approved. There being no further discussion, the motion passed.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Clyde L. Reese III reported on publicity related to child deaths. It's a tragedy when a child dies, whether in the DFCS system or the general population. So it is incumbent upon us to do what we can to mitigate these occurrences. We understand that as hard as our staff works, as dedicated and committed as they are, we will have adverse events, so we want to see what we can do to prevent those occurrences ahead of the issue to the greatest extent possible. These are ongoing discussions and it's an important issue to everyone here prior to any publicity and it remains so after that publicity goes away.

A discussion was held with the Governor yesterday about some of our ideas. He had ideas that we think will be helpful. He's knowledgeable, a former juvenile court judge, so he's very much aware of these issues. He also understands that we are dealing with human beings and the difficulties that come with that. We are also in the midst of probably the worst economic downturn since the great depression, which is not over, and it's always the lowest income population who recover from such a downturn last or at the end. We see things that have some implications with the level of poverty in the State and the stresses that come with that. So we are mindful of all these things and are doing everything we can to address it.

Commissioner Reese stated that in addition to all agencies working together, we also need the support of the community, churches, boys' and girls' clubs, schools -- everyone -- to help us try to keep children safe. The media's help is also needed. It's one thing to do an "expose" of implications of malfeasance or neglect on the part of officials, but there are also positive ways the media can help get the word out, such as co-sleeping, and water safety, particularly in the summer, and car seat safety. They will be asked to help publicize these dangers. The Commissioner will report on the progress.

Commissioner Reese discussed the eligibility project that Venkat Krishnan spoke of earlier. It's one of the most important projects that is going on now for a couple of reasons. The Department has lost employees over the last 3-4 years. DFCS is the largest single program with the largest number of employees. If we look at the eligibility side of DFCS, those front line workers in the offices who process the applications for Medicaid, TANF, food stamps and child care subsidy, and we look at the child welfare

side – if you're going to look at how you do more with less, how staffing is allocated, it's true that technology can be used to enhance efficiency on the eligibility side. If we can leverage technology to help efficiency on the eligibility side, this project will ultimately allow us to replace the SUCCESS system and allow us to allocate our staffing where it's most needed. It's a unique opportunity for the state to upgrade and get a state of the art system across all of its services. Ultimately the threshold decision was made to keep the integration that exists in Georgia for eligibility with Medicaid. There was a consideration that Medicaid take the funds and go on its own, but as a state the decision was made that we would maintain an integrated eligibility system. Even though the child care subsidy is going over to the Department of Early Care and Learning, we are going to retain the eligibility portion of that in our offices. The federal government has come together through all the oversight agencies, both CMS and those agencies that oversee food stamps, USDA, Food and Nutrition Services, Administration for Children and Families, and said we are going to allow you to use this money to work on all these services if you do it in an integrated fashion. So we tried to design this project to take advantage of that and when we get to a point where we have a state of the art system, it will allow us to do our job better, and allow us to give better service to our clients. It's a very important project.

With regard to Kenny A, Commissioner Reese feels that it's impossible to be compliant with the consent decree as written. There's language in the decree that talks about substantial compliance and he would like to get to a point where we can argue to the children's rights folk that we are in substantial compliance. We have tried to establish an open and positive communication so at the proper time they will see that our hearts are in the right place and we are trying to do what we need to do. We don't want to be driven by Fulton and DeKalb counties, we want to do the right thing for children in all 159 counties not just what a court order requires us to do. So that's where we are trying to get and our team is working with us on that.

Next, he gave an update on the Vocational Rehabilitation transfer. Originally, the legislative proposal was to bring the Vocational Rehabilitation programs and services from the Department of Labor to the Department of Human Services and it would be a fifth division within the Department. He stated there was more official opposition from a fellow state agency than he had seen in any circumstance before. There was public and official opposition to this proposal from the Department of Labor from day one. They contacted their clients and maybe gave a very strong impression that this would be a great disruption and harm to the services that they receive. So there was quite a bit of discussion and controversy about it over at the General Assembly. The Governor is a very reasonable gentleman and determined that the proposal should be amended to make Vocational Rehabilitation programs and services a separate stand alone agency as opposed to being a part of the Department of Human Services. But that agency would be attached administratively to us. What that means is we have two small attached agencies now, the Council on Aging and Family Connections. The theory in state government is that you have an entity that has its own policy and rule making authority, they are independent, but the agency to which they are attached will provide infrastructure support and administrative support to allow them to function, to allow them to do things they might not have the expertise or manpower to accomplish.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services is a large group, around 2,000 people throughout the state, but they will be attached to us. This amended proposal passed the House. It was voted on and approved by the Senate yesterday and all that remains is that it be signed into law by the Governor. Our transition team is working on this and all the details. Keith Horton has been leading that effort and we've had all the senior staff involved so we are continuing that process. We continued it all through the deliberation of the bill during the General Assembly and we are pretty sure that with regard to things like facilities, technology to some extent, finance, human resources, even legal support, we are going to have to provide a great deal to the new agency. They will have their own executive director appointed by the Governor and approved by their board. They will have their own governing board, but we are certain we are going to have to provide a great deal of support. We are prepared to do that, ready to do that and we are working on the details. We've had some limited cooperation from the Department of Labor while this has been discussed, but now that the bill has been passed we are hopeful that we will be able to get more into the details to determine just what it is we will need to do for them and what going forward after July 1, when they become a stand-alone agency, what we'll continue do. So we are moving full speed ahead with that.

In April the Board will be given a full report on what happened in the General Assembly this year. You've heard about the bills that would require drug testing for certain human services applicants, primarily TANF, that's still alive. You've heard about the bill that would require applicants or clients to make certain that they are engaging in personal responsibility activities, that's still alive. We'll know next month what happened with that and give you a full report.

Also, there are a lot of technology initiatives going on so at the April meeting, Venkat Krishnan will give an overview of those initiatives.

Commissioner Reese stressed the importance of completing contracts correctly and in a timely fashion. Currently, that is a work in progress and we are continuing to move in that direction. We want to open up to procurements and requests for proposals so that we are not just choosing a vendor just because they've been a vendor for years, but because they are the best, they offer the best price, product, and service for what we need, so we have procurement issues that we want to address as well. In that vein, a contracts procurement and vendor management director has been brought on board – her name is Marial Ellis. Marial is an experienced attorney that has worked with the Commissioner in years past in Medicaid. She's a contracts expert, and has great management and organizational skills. She will work well with the agency across the board, across all of our programs and our offices to bring all of this together.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Tiena Fletcher agreed with what was said about substantial compliance with the Kenny A consent decree. It's something that needs closure and understands that it's a work in progress.

She also welcomed Ms. Ellis, and is glad she joined our team and believes she will do a good job in contracts.

Ms. Fletcher concluded the Chair's report.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board of Human Services will be Wednesday, April 18, 2012, Two Peachtree Street, N.W., Suite 29.250, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.



Monica Walters, Secretary

APPROVED:



Tiena Fletcher, Chair