



Georgia Department of Human Services

Aging Services | Child Support Services | Family & Children Services

DFCS Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

March 5, 2024

Hybrid, In-Person and Teams Meeting

Board members present: Chair Shondeana Morris (R14), Vice Chair Meredith Holt (R13), Secretary Jennifer Shinpoch (AL), Randel Hambrick (R3), Deke Copenhaver (R7), Belva Dorsey (R8), Travis Niblett (R9), Laci Tippins (R11), Allyson Christianson (12), Jeff Mauer (AL), JaNice VanNess (AL), Virgil Costley (AL), Susie Weller (AL)

Board members absent: Nancy White (R6), Tommy Hill (R10) Vacant (R1), Vacant (R4), Vacant (R5), Vacant (AL)

DHS staff: LaMarva Ivory, Mary Havick, John Hallman, Melissa Barwick, Emma McCullough, Emily Hatchett

Welcome and Introductions, housekeeping. Meeting called to order at 10:03 a.m.

Presentation by Melissa Barwick, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Finance

- Summary of DFCS Budget Changes
 - Amended State Fiscal Year 2024 budget was signed last week. Total Recommended for DHS is \$798,533,156
 - State Fiscal Year 2025 budget is in process. Total recommended thus far with Governor and House recommendations is \$827,014,364.
- AFY 2024 Changes from Governor Recommendations to Legislature Conference Committee
 - \$1,000 salary supplements for all full-time benefits eligible staff, which went to staff in December [Statewide Adjustments]
 - \$214,146 to increase funds for the full cost of two community action treatment team pilot programs [Child Welfare Services]
 - \$2,061,147 to increase funds for labor and wage data verification services [Federal Eligibility Benefit Services]
 - \$65,524 *reduction* in funds for a duplicative QR codes contract [Federal Eligibility Benefit Services]
 - \$3,167,659 to increase funds for technology upgrades and improvements to the SGINES child welfare case management system [Child Welfare Services]
 - Plus additional monies for organizations appropriated directly by the General Assembly that pass through the DHS budget
- FY 2025 Changes- Governor's Recommendations Only
 - \$10,847,248 to provide a 4% cost-of-living adjustment for state employees not to exceed \$3,000 [Statewide Adjustments, All DFCS]
 - \$214,146 to increase funds for the full cost of two community action treatment team pilot programs [Child Welfare Services]
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- \$630,057 to increase funds for 23 county customer service staff to provide staff in every customer service center
- \$30,611 increase in funds to reflect 2023 collection of marriage and divorce filing fees [Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention]
- \$1,418,935 increase in funds for technology upgrades and improvements to the SHINES case management system [Child Welfare Services]
- \$4,663,798 increase in funds to provide a \$3,000 salary enhancement for child protection and placement services caseworkers [Child Welfare Services]

Presentation by Emma McCullough, Director, Governmental Affairs

- House Bill 571, Sponsored by Representative Deborah Silcox
 - Agency Legislation
 - Requires the Georgia Alzheimer's and Related Dementias State Plan Advisory Council to amend the state plan every four years instead of every three years
 - Status: Governor's Desk awaiting signature
- Senate Bill 342, Sponsored by Senator Randy Roberston
 - Agency Legislation
 - Adds the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) among the agencies specifically authorized to receive confidential child welfare information directly from DFCS
 - Status: Passed Senate; Awaiting hearing in House Juvenile Justice Committee
- Senate Bill 377, Sponsored by Senator Blake Tillery
 - Agency Legislation
 - Adds Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs) as a type of Child-Caring Institution (CCI)
 - Status: Passed Senate; Passed House Public Health Committee; Awaiting vote on House Floor
- Senate Bill 483, Sponsored by Senator Bo Hatchett
 - Agency Legislation
 - Enacts the revised Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC)
 - Status: Status: Passed Senate; Awaiting hearing in House Juvenile Justice Committee
- Senate Bill 520, Sponsored by Senator Bill Cowser
 - Agency Legislation
 - Aligns the Georgia code with federal law by updating terminology and comprehensively replacing "income deduction orders (IDOs)" with federal "income withholding orders (IWOs)".
 - Status: Passed Senate; Awaiting hearing in House Juvenile Justice Committee
- Senate Bill 387, Sponsored by Senator Kay Kirkpatrick
 - Senate Foster Care and Adoptions Study Committee Legislation



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- Provides for free identification cards for children in state custody or receiving extended care youth services; requires DFCS staff to ensure that every child younger than 14 has a photograph of themselves
- Status: Passed Senate; Awaiting hearing in House Juvenile Justice Committee
- Senate Bill 401, Sponsored by Senator Kay Kirkpatrick
 - Senate Foster Care and Adoptions Study Committee Legislation
 - Requires each juvenile court to collect data to be submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts to be incorporated into the Georgia Juvenile Data Exchange
 - Status: Passed Senate; Awaiting hearing in House Juvenile Justice Committee

Presentation by John Hallman, DHS Deputy Commissioner, Office of Family Independence

- 2023 Focus: Hire, Hire, Hire!
 - Resulted in 1,223 new employees
 - Fall 2023 “Listening Tour” of select offices and call centers
 - Top Concerns Expressed: Pay & Supervision
 - Retention efforts focus on those two concerns
- 2024 Focus: Retention
 - OFI Career Path (Case Workers with 0-5 years experience)
 - Addresses pay concerns
 - Achievable milestones and pay increases over five-year period
 - Trains caseworkers in multiple programs
 - Nesting Program
 - Addresses support concerns
 - Organized, welcoming, efficient start for new OFI employees
 - Expanded mentoring process
 - Firm foundation that encourages staff retention
 - Supervisor Summits (Veteran Workers)
 - Help frontline leaders grow skills needed to lead and support staff
 - Combination of hard and soft-skills directly affect retention in OFI
 - Specific training topics include OHR Policy Overview, Gateway Dashboard Management, Customer Service for Leaders and How to Have Difficult Conversations
 - Retention Survey for Staff
 - Piloting a seven-question survey of staff a.k.a. “Stay Survey”
 - Customer Service Task Force will review initial survey results and feedback from participants
 - Additional field staff will receive survey in March/April
 - Data will be compiled to reflect identified trends and task force will provide recommendations from the field to leadership
 - Task force plans to issue follow up survey to staff within six to eight months of initial survey



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- Ongoing surveys will provide OFI leadership with feedback directly from frontline workers
- Data Report- January 2024
 - Unduplicated Families Served Across All Programs: 1,372,315
 - Caseload Size: 910
 - Frontline Staffing Levels: 1,508
 - SNAP issuance total: \$259,492,630.
 - Average issuance per family: \$388.
 - SNAP Families: Total SNAP Families 669,370
 - SNAP Applications Processed: 59,000
 - SNAP Renewals Processed: 98,159
 - Active Medical Assistance families: 975,603
 - Medical Assistance applications processed: 159,667
 - Total TANF issuance: \$1,133,902
 - Average issuance per family: \$265.
 - Total TANF families: 4,280
 - TANF Applications Processed: 3,581

Presentation by Mary Havick, DHS Deputy Commissioner, Child Welfare

- Technology Modernization
 - Argo Placements: launched statewide and was updated to allow placement search across all placement types
 - Georgia Communicare: Statewide rollout in January 2024
- Communicare
 - Interconnected web portals designed to support and enhance child welfare programs
 - Primary user groups: CASA, foster parents, and parents
 - Preparing to launch Georgia Communicare mobile app
- Argo Placements
 - Aids in searching for a foster home or group home for a child by matching the child's needs to the home's attributes
 - Launched in October 2023
- Georgia Foster and Adoptive Family Assessment
 - Assessment will give Georgia foster and adoptive families, both public and private, the opportunity to share their experiences and suggest improvements to the child welfare system
 - Steering committee of key partners to help co-design and guide the assessment materials
 - Committee began meeting in January 2024
 - Survey released on March 1, 2024
- Well-Being Section
 - New Section Leader: Donjai Calhoun
 - Educational Programming, Assessment, and Consultation (EPAC) Unit provides academic support services



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- Georgia Resilient, Youth-Centered, Stable, and Empowered Program provides eligible youth ages 14-21 with opportunities to prepare for adulthood
 - Celebration of Excellence Luncheon: June 27, 2024
- Statewide Child Welfare Data Indicators
 - Georgia performs better than most states in:
 - Maltreatment in care
 - Recurrence of maltreatment
 - Placement stability
 - Georgia performs the same as most states in:
 - Reentry into foster care
 - Georgia performs worse than most states in:
 - Permanency with 12-months at entry into care, within 12-23 month stays, and 24+ month stays

Board Business

Board Meeting Dates for remainder of 2024: May 21, 2024, August 13, 2024, November 12, 2024.

Advisory Board Member Regional Reports

- R3 – Randel Hambrick
 - **Areas of growth:** Several counties have vacancies and working to fill. We've seen a good bit of turnover and are working to hire and train staff, hiring for the Paulding director position and have had several applicants, and hiring for the CPS administrator position in Douglas. Douglas County continues to experience Juvenile court judges giving custody to the Department due to parents refusing to have the youth in their homes. Floyd identified a tremendous need in 2023 to expand prevention services in our community as 477 reported cases in 2023 were screened out. Region is working to develop a system of investing in these families to prevent future calls. Partnering with Restoration Rome and Paulding Family Alliance to create a structured program to improve the connection families have with community supports.
 - **Successes:** Douglas partnering with our Juvenile Court Judges and Juvenile Programs on children enrolled in CHANCE court, and faith-based partners for additional support for birth and foster parents. County hosted Thanksgiving and Holiday dinners for birth and foster parents, and saw strong community support from Casa, attorneys, etc., Bartow investing in youth with the support of the state ILP team. Gatherings at the DFCS office quarterly, and speakers are teaching financial literacy, mental health awareness, self-care.
- R9 – Travis Niblett
 - **Areas of growth:** High employee turnover, foster homes at capacity, need for foster home recruitment



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- **Successes:** Shana Lewis is new Regional Director, No hoteling in Region 9 in 4 months
- R11 – Laci Gillis Tippins
 - **Areas of growth:** High turnover, retention, need for foster homes, children being placed outside of region, Regional meeting next week so will have more information following that
- R12 – Allyson Christianson
 - **Areas of growth:** Turnover rate, working to see what community can do to better support DFCS
 - **Successes:** All county director positions will be filled this month, leveraging local organizations resources and services, working to meet actual needs of Department versus perceived needs
- R13 – Meredith Holt
 - **Areas of growth:** Continue to have large turnover
 - **Successes:** New Director, Travis Moses, Hosted “Realistic Job Preview Day”- very successful and will implement this preview day in Region 14
- R14 – Shondeana Morris
 - **Areas of growth:** Need for more foster homes
 - **Successes:** DeKalb County pilot program with Juvenile court judge and trained physicians to come up with prevention program for youth at-risk of coming into DFCS, Employee morale is improving, Cocoa and Cookies Event with the Court and Foster families hosted at the end of last year, New Juvenile Court Judge was appointed in January

Closing remarks and parting words from Chair Morris

Special Meeting to be scheduled in April to discuss Board goals and vision

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.