

Health & Human Services Committee

July 25, 2023

Minutes

Members Present: Committee Chair Anthony Doldo, Legislators Allen Drake, John Peck, Frances Calarco, Steel Potter, Corey Grant, and Board Chair William Johnson

Others Present: Legislators Robert Cantwell, Philip Reed, Michael Montigelli, Daniel McBride, James Nabywaniec, and Patrick Jareo, County Administrator Robert Hagemann, Deputy Administrator Sarah Baldwin, County Attorney David Paulsen, Conf. Asst. for Fiscal Affairs Ashley Durham, Office for the Aging Director Bethany Munn, Community Services Director Tim Ruetten, Public Health Service Deputy Director Steve Jennings, DSS Commissioner Teresa Gaffney, DSS Deputy Commissioner Karen Marcum, Highway Superintendent James Lawrence, Human Resources Director Valerie Nugent, Sheriff Pete Barnett, Undersheriff Kris Spencer, WWNY TV Reporter Sandy Torres, Confidential Secretary Jill Jones

Chairman Doldo called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The Committee approved the minutes of the June meeting, as written and Chairman Doldo offered privilege of the floor.

Samantha Fenton, 734 Knickerbocker Drive, Watertown related a difficult and unresolved situation she has had with the Department of Social Services removing her child from her home due to accusations made against her fiancé. She said both the Army and Watertown City Police have cleared her fiancé, but she still does not have her child back in her home and felt it was taking too long for DSS to resolve the matter.

Liz Daugherty, Clayton, NY said she contacted legislators in the past and again recently about what she believes is mismanagement of the Department of Social Services by the Commissioner. She felt such mismanagement would continue if Ms. Marcum is appointed as Commissioner and urged legislators to really look at what is going on in DSS and make the appropriate changes.

Courtney Handy, Manager on this engagement for Bonadio Group made a presentation to the Committee concerning an Operational Analysis they did of the Child Welfare Division of the Jefferson County Department of Social Services over the period of about six months. Before she talked about their procedures, she related the things they did not do. She said they did not: shadow caseworkers or go into the field with them; speak to clients; speak to service providers; go back to management and relate what workers have said; and they do not name people in the report by either their given name or by job title. As part of this analysis they interviewed DSS personnel, performed process walkthroughs, analyzed operational workflows and related documentation, and reviewed policies and procedures. She said they performed a quality control case review of the Child Protective Services program, Foster Care program and Preventive Services and compared them to Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) standards. Ms

Handy said they had excellent participation from employees (86%) which allowed them to gain insight necessary to identify the strengths and shortcomings of the Department.

Ms. Handy said they looked at budgeted positions and caseload analysis, and case review for each of the units; this included review of 15 cases in each unit (investigations, preventive and foster care).

For CPS investigations they used the Ongoing Monitoring Assessment (OMA) tool of the NYS OCFS and looked at seven different criteria, and six of those criteria were essentially strong. (Anything above 85% was strong, anything between 85%-75% was considered recommendation for action plan, and 74% or below was an area for improvement). One improvement needed was timeliness of progress notes within thirty days of the event date. They also looked at an OCFS metric history and current standings which are done monthly for each county. This includes how many cases each worker has (15 cases per worker is ideal); percentage of overdue investigations; and percentage of safety assessments approved within 7 days. Consistently the department has caseworkers with greater than 15 cases; over 50% of CPS investigations have been overdue where Jefferson County was averaging 90 days, the standard is 60 days from start to finish; and Jefferson County for at least six months was ranked in the top of the State for completing safety assessments in 7 days. She said overall they were impressed with the casework that has been done.

Ms. Handy said it is a little different for ongoing cases such as preventive services and foster care; OCFS does not have a strict metric that they can test a case by in these units. They look at how often a child is being seen, supervisory reviews, and best practices they have come to know in their experience in performing this work for so many years, such as how long it takes for a referral to be made when a County receives a case. Overall she said they saw some really strong case work but there was lack of supervisory review, or lack of evidence of such review. Supervisory reviews are key with staff turnover so you can tell the progress of a case and what action items need to be followed up on; and it provides critical feedback to less experienced caseworkers as to what they are doing right and where they need to improve. In terms of foster care Title IV- E review which provides federal reimbursement for room and board for foster care children for states, they did a walk through and did some testing and had minor recommendations but overall they were really impressed with determinations and the process for that.

Upon the conclusion of their analysis Ms. Handy said their recommendations are:

- For cases with a potential conflict of interest, Jefferson County's sensitive case assignment protocol was fairly outdated (2017) and they recommended working with Oswego, St. Lawrence and Lewis counties to update the protocol of how these cases will be handled. OCFS mandates that every local department of social services have a documented sensitive case assignment protocol usually with a surrounding county. If such a case does stay within the department she said it should be earmarked as sensitive so only the caseworker and supervisor would have access to it.
- Reassigning the community service workers who assist caseworkers so they are assigned to a specific unit. They were impressed with the community service

workers knowledge and interest, and felt integrating them into the ongoing units will be effective and help relieve the burden on caseworkers.

- With regard to caseworkers using personal cell phones, they did not necessarily advocate for buying County cell phones for everyone, but modifying the existing IT Mobile Device policy to prohibit any sort of pictures or correspondence on your personal phone, and if something is on a personal phone educate workers how to purge their phone if they don't already know how.
- With regard to caseworkers using their personal vehicles, they recommended buying a small fleet of vehicles that will be at the disposal of the employees, especially for removals as this is a trend in other counties, and the cost of the county reimbursing employee for mileage and the process to submit for reimbursement seemed time consuming and duplicative.
- Installing a metal detector at the Human Services Building for safety purposes as most visitation occurs in the DSS offices. Jefferson County is the only County they have worked in without a metal detector at Social Services.
- Sign on and retention bonus' for the caseworkers. She said Jefferson County's caseworkers are the highest paid in the area, but there are still retention issues. The County currently has 28 budgeted caseworker positions (with only 22 filled) and they recommended there be 31 budgeted positions to cover the caseload, which allows for 5 people coming out of rotation for sick, vacation, etc.
- Further with regard to staffing they also recommended creation of an additional Grade A Supervisor position so that there are two supervisory positions; one to oversee CPS investigations, and the other to oversee preventive and foster care.

Ms. Handy said overall there were no surprises with what they found, and they were pleased with the strong case work that is being done with limited staffing. Ms. Handy answered questions of legislators related to their analysis and recommendations.

DSS Commissioner Teresa Gaffney provided the Committee with an Action Plan in response to each of the items that were noted for improvement in the Operational Analysis done by the Bonadio Group (copy attached for file reference). She outlined each of the following recommendations and the action being taken in response: Enhance the current quality review process or establish a dedicated Quality Assurance position that is committed exclusively to case review; Enhance the process to monitor and review board rates, Grade A position over ongoing; Enhance the case transfer process; Ensure accurate listing of Foster Care children by IV-E status; Ensure accurate listing of Foster Care children by TANF-EAF status; Update the Sensitive Case Assignment Protocol; Increase transparency into community service worker utilization and availability; Offer employee wellness benefits targeted toward mental and physical health; Improve worker safety; Increase caseworker positions; Provide County vehicles and improve mileage reimbursement process; Examine ways to incentivize on-call shifts; Review the use of Personal Mobile Technology. Along with the recommendation and planned action, she further identified agency staff that are responsible for completing the action, the current status/plan of the recommended action items, and a possible completion date for each. She noted that many of the items have been completed or are near completion. With particular attention to caseworker recruitment and retention Commissioner Gaffney emphasized that they and Human Resources

has been doing everything possible from continuous recruitment to offering the test on an almost monthly basis and she simply wasn't sure if money (signing/retention bonuses) is the answer to having more people apply for these positions. She said it is a very stressful job, people just can't fathom the emotional roller coaster that caseworkers go through, and there is a competitive job market right now. She said a full staff is ideal, and they would have the ability and time to do the job well, but that is not the reality of the situation. Commissioner Gaffney answered questions of legislators related to the detailed Action Plan.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2023 County Budget to Allocate Additional State Aid for Community Services Programs and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Calarco seconded by Legislator Peck and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2023 County Budget Relative to Community Services Department and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Potter seconded by Legislator Grant and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreement with Samaritan Medical Center for Participation with Low Income Drug Discount Benefits Through Section 340B of the Public Health Services Act and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Calarco seconded by Legislator Drake and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2023 County Budget Relative to Public Health Department Home Health Accounts and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Peck seconded by Legislator Potter and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

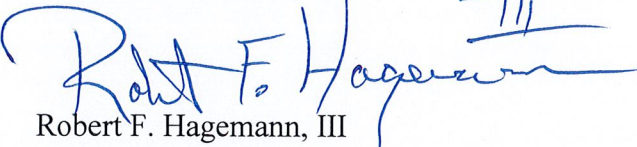
Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2023 County Budget Relative to Public Health Department EMS Accounts and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Peck seconded by Legislator Calarco and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2023 County Budget in Relation to Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Reopening Schools Grant Award and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Peck seconded by Legislator Potter and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo entertained a motion to go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter. Such motion was made by Legislator Potter seconded by Legislator Grant and unanimously carried; the Committee entered executive session at 7:10 p.m. The Committee returned to open session at 8:45 p.m. on a motion by Legislator Peck seconded by Legislator Grant and unanimously carried.

There being no further business of the Committee, on a motion by Legislator Peck seconded by Legislator Drake and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert F. Hagemann, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "III" at the end.

Robert F. Hagemann, III
Clerk of the Board