



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting  
Minutes  
November 18, 2021 - 1:00 p.m.  
Location: 2100 Comer Avenue, Columbus GA 31904

### **Call to Order**

The Muscogee County Georgia Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting was held on November 18, 2021 via Microsoft Teams.

### **Attendees/Participants**

New Board members – Dr. Darlene Smalls and Dr. Johnny Flakes participated in the meeting.

Members – Jennifer Melvin, Charonda Huff and Tolua Pallo were not in attendance.

Georgia Division of Family and Children Services staff in attendance – were Muscogee County Director Tonika Wadley and the Administrative Assistant - Chris Nunn.

**Review/Approval of minutes from last meeting(s)** The minutes from the previous meeting were not approved since there was not a quorum. However, Mrs. Wadley assured the Board members they'd receive those minutes to review in an upcoming email.

### **Old Business**

There was no old business to discuss.

### **New Business**

After a brief welcome and thank you to those in attendance, Mrs. Wadley shared the agenda and then drew attention to item three – November is National Adoption Month. She indicated that recognition and celebration of the adoptive parents, children and resources will be observed this Saturday, November 20<sup>th</sup> from 5-7 p.m. here at the DFCS office. During this event, information will be available to those who may be interested in becoming adoptive parents, as well. This will be a drive through event with a projector displaying details to become

adoptive parents. The Board members were encouraged to direct persons who may be interested in becoming adoptive parents to contact our office for more information.

Next, each Board member was given the opportunity to introduce themselves. They both shared their gratefulness to serve in this capacity and looked forward to learning how they both can contribute to their positions on the Board. Mrs. Wadley also introduced herself – sharing that she has been with the Muscogee Co. office for just over a year this past July – yet has been with the Department of Family and Children services for 20 years. Additionally, she shared that we have a large number of new staff and that the turnover rate in the state is really high, but for Muscogee County, the rate isn't as high. The numbers the past year, Mrs. Wadley shared, has been steady and consistent.

Mrs. Wadley revealed to the Board that Muscogee County's office has had a tarnished reputation in the past; however, she has worked diligently with the community partners to change that image. In so doing, differences are being made with the understanding that we can't do this work alone. Things are better now than they were.

The Personnel Report was the next item of discussion. Mrs. Wadley shared that the Muscogee County office consists of 3 Teams – Office of Family Independence where applications for food stamps, Medicaid and TANF are processed; Social Services program which has our Child Protective Unit and Foster Care and Adoption Unit; and Child Protective Services – who are the first responders to reports of child maltreatment. The staff are skilled to assess and determine the services needed to permit the children remaining in the home. Otherwise, an appeal to Juvenile Court is made to have child/children removed for their safety. Currently, there are no vacancies on the leadership team. Mrs. Wadley expressed how thankful she was to be able to report this. A brief description of the other positions was shared before she gave the details of the Social Services monthly report. Dr. Smalls asked, what constitutes a closure? Mrs. Wadley replied that when the risk of maltreatment is considerably low after the assessment done by her team – then the case is deemed to be closed.

Rev. Flakes commended Mrs. Wadley for her transparency of sharing with them the past circumstances of the department versus now. He asked – How important is/are the demographics of those coming into the department for services and if

those individual aspects/demographics are taken and explored by her office? Mrs. Wadley answered by sharing – not on a local level, but that there's an Intake team that is statewide who does look at the specifics for reporting purposes. She added that her department is able to retrieve the details from the state, but on the local level, we are able to determine the type of maltreatment children experience and the factors that led up or contributed to the maltreatment. She gave, as an example of factors – drug use and mental health issues. The details gathered locally are essentially used for staff training purposes. Also, it was shared of the large volume of sexual abuse cases. The Board was informed of the services rendered to the families on the army base too – which is largely domestic circumstances. All other statistics needed is derived from the state's data bank.

Mrs. Wadley reviewed briefly the details regarding Food Stamps and Medicaid and assured the Board that they would receive the documents soon. Dr. Smalls asked about the impact of the pandemic on the numbers that were shared by Mrs. Wadley. To wit, Mrs. Wadley shared that the number of TANF applicants have gone down; however, Food Stamps and Medicaid applications have increased. The P-EBT (Pandemic EBT) have been made available to those who haven't, in the past, been able to qualify for Food Stamps. Therefore, there has been a significant increase in the numbers – as those who receive free or reduced lunches are automatically eligible to receive those benefits. Medicaid applicants have increased due to the high unemployment numbers. She added that while the office is opened, our staff are largely working remotely. Applications are being processed daily for the benefits needed by our families. We can see clients in the office; however, they have to schedule appointments beforehand, reported Mrs. Wadley.

Rev. Flakes inquired about the Case Management – Case ratio. Mrs. Wadley shared for the Child Protective Services Case Managers – it depends on the number of reports received. Currently, the case load is 15-20 for Child Protective Case Managers and Family Preservation Case Managers. The numbers prior, according to Mrs. Wadley were considerably higher. The numbers were made manageable as a result of Mrs. Wadley asking for assistance from other departments across the state and state office. Now, with manageable numbers per Case Managers, the turnover rate is low. She also shared that providing monthly and quarterly ongoing training for staff in different areas of child protection. When asked about retention efforts in place within the department by Dr. Smalls, Mrs. Wadley shared that on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of each month we host


Knowledge Management Sessions regarding policies, practices and guidelines. Implementing this is really helpful given 95% of her Child Protective staff are new, young and just out of college. Providing all staff with information has helped contribute to her ability to retain staff. Supervisors are provided the same opportunity to train, so they can be adequately prepared to lead their staff. She added, hiring more staff contributes to staff being retained, too. However, with all that is done and seen within the Department of Family and Children Services – one year on board in Muscogee Co. is positive.

The Board training PowerPoint was covered by Mrs. Wadley with plans to share the details with them in an upcoming email.

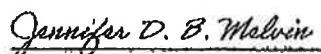
During the presentation information regarding an upcoming Holiday event for staff was provided by Chris Nunn. The event is scheduled for December 10<sup>th</sup> at 12 noon here at the office. Seventy-six people have RSVP for the lunch event. Mr. V's BBQ and Catering Services will prepare the meal. An email will be provided to the Board to get approval for this event via an email from Mrs. Wadley. Thereafter, copies of the Board's reply will be sent to Regional Accounting for review and to request the check.

Rev. Flakes asked why Muscogee County's budget doesn't provide more funds to DFCS? However, Mrs. Wadley hasn't been provided an explanation for this circumstance. Yet, she encouraged the Board to assist in learning more details from the County Commission. She also added that county funds are an addition to monies received from the state and federal government. Some 90% of Muscogee Co. DFCS' budget is from the State of Georgia and the Federal Government. Mrs. Wadley thanked the attendees and invited them to the drive through luncheon on December 10<sup>th</sup> and reminded them of the items they'll receive via email soon.

With no other items to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 2:12 p.m.



Board County Secretary  
Tonika Wadley Director  
Muscogee County DFCS



Board Chairperson  
Jennifer Melvin  
Muscogee County DFCS