



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting
Minutes
March 17, 2022 - 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 March 17, 2022 via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees/Participants

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

Members – Jennifer Melvin, and Tolua Pailo 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) All details of the February, 2022 Board meeting were provided to each Board member via 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 that the agency was gearing up for next month's National Child Abuse Prevention Month's activities. She briefly talked about the purposes for the blue pinwheels (Child Abuse Prevention) that will be on display at our building's location and throughout the Columbus area. The pinwheels, according to Mrs. Wadley can be ordered from the State office for any agency who is interested in displaying them at their perspective locations.

Additionally, she shared that on April 4, 2022, the Chattahoochee Valley Area Child Abuse Protocol will be signed again. This protocol is signed annually by those who have the charge of composing the protocol – which are the Superior

Court Judges, Juvenile Court Judges, Law Enforcement, Department of Family and Children Services, School systems, and the Child Advocacy Centers. Other counties, outside of Muscogee that are involved in this effort are – Chattahoochee and Harris counties. Also, during the month of April, there will be a Staff Appreciation Cookout or “A Family Reunion.” The event will take place on April 22, 2022. This will give the staff opportunity to see each other and to unwind from the work. Our agency is still working remotely, as a result, of COVID 19. An email or text message will be provided by Mr. Nunn to each Board Member for approval to use County funds for this event.

Mrs. Wadley has submitted this year’s proposal request for County Funds to the Commissioner’s office last month. She has requested \$70,000.00 this year. She plans to share the details of this proposal with each Board member, with the hopes of them offering their support of the requested funds. Nicholas Clinkscales is a contact person within the Columbus Consolidated Government office. The funds requested are helpful in our providing more trainings for staff, team building and staff appreciation events – all of which helps strengthen retention of our staff.

She reported that the lobby was opened on March 1st and is open to the Office of Family Independence clients (those receiving Food Stamps, Medicaid and TANF benefits) on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of each week, from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. Same day services, processing of applications are still done remotely; however, appointments are available for those who wish to speak/meet with a Case Manager.

OFI was awarded a temporary salary supplement that began back in December, 2021 and will end in September, 2022. The amount was not known at the time. This salary increase is derived from a different pot of money, than the County funds.

Mrs. Wadley also shared details regarding the Governor’s proposed amendments for this fiscal year and next fiscal year’s budgets. The proposal consisted of a \$5,000.00 pay increase for all full time, benefit eligible State employees. He also proposed annualizing that \$5,000.00 increase starting next fiscal year. Additionally, he proposed that our employers match our 401K contributions from 3% to 9%. Currently, they are matching at 3%. The Governor has also proposed

that we be allowed to withdraw funds to be paid for 40 hours of annual leave. All of the proposals have been approved. This fiscal year ends June 30th and the next fiscal year will begin July 1st.

All details of how it will be allocated hasn't been disclosed. The increase will be helpful in our retention rate.

Mrs. Wadley reported there is currently approximately \$35,000.00 remaining in the County funds budget. She hopes to have the ability to do more trainings, community events, staff appreciation events other than just during the Holidays or Special Months like Child Abuse Prevention with any additional monies received. The extra monies can be used to purchase more car seats, and pack and plays. Unfortunately, there have been a number of child deaths to co-sleeping, even after the hospital and our office have provided education on the importance of safe sleep. Mrs. Wadley added that on a weekly basis – there are reports of women with babies who are using illegal substances or have addictions to prescription medicines; therefore, these babies brought into care are in need of safe places to sleep. Mrs. Wadley went on to share that the drug epidemic is out of hand, currently in Columbus, GA and this is the reason she is interested in providing substance abuse education and building parental capacities for the mothers even after they've become sober. This again, is why the County funds are pertinent to our agency.

Dr. Smalls plans to recommend to a group (Mt. Calvary Minister's Wives and Widows) the idea of purchasing more pack and plays to donate to our office. Pastor Flakes asked about the current County Funds Budget amount, to which, Mrs. Wadley shared \$40,000.00 as the amount.

Lastly, Mrs. Wadley reported that we are still hiring. There are no vacancies as she has been permitted to overfill/over hire. Additional interviews are scheduled for next, with the hopes that four more case managers are hired. The case managers who have departed have been ones who were new to the agency with few or no cases assigned to them.

OFI has seen an increase in the number of clients for Food Stamps and Medicaid; however, they have managed to maintain their timeliness rate at 95%. This percentage have actually been exceeded, Mrs. Wadley believed.

Mrs. Wadley thanked the attendees and indicated her plan to forward to each of them the details pertaining to the budget proposal and the contact person, too.

With no other items to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Tonika Wadley

Board County Secretary
Tonika Wadley Director
Muscogee County DFCS

Jennifer D. B. Melvin

Board Chairperson
Jennifer Melvin
Muscogee County DFCS