



Muscogee County Division of Family and Children Services Board Meeting Minutes  
December 15, 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's December 2022 meeting was called to order by Board President – Mrs. Jennifer Melvin. Today's meeting was held via Microsoft Teams.

#### Attendees/Participants

Dr. Johnny Flakes, Mrs. Gwendolyn McIntosh, Mrs. Jennifer Melvin, and Dr. Darlene Smalls attended the meeting.

Member –Tolua Puailoa was 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 November 2022 Board meeting were provided to each Board member via email.

#### Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

#### New Business

Mrs. Wadley greeted the Board Members and thanked them for their attendance. She indicated that the meeting will be a short one, given our staff are awaiting more deliveries of Christmas toys. We have been very fortunate to have received an abundant number of toys and gifts for our children in care/Foster Care as well as children in Family Preservation cases. In addition to what has already been received, there were more to come from our community partners, individuals, and groups today and next week. Pastor Flakes shared about the toy giveaway for families from 10-12 noon on Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup> at Fourth Street MBC. The flyer regarding the event was shared with our team already.

Mrs. Wadley shared about the All-staff luncheon that took place last Friday, December 11, 2022. The event went very well. This meeting/luncheon consisted of our Office of Family Independence and Social Service teams. Door prizes, games, and a great meal was shared. She thanked the Board members for approving the funds to see this opportunity come to fruition.

The Annual Board Report was produced and sent up to the State office by Mrs. Wadley. This report is one that is submitted once a year to the State Office that details the various things happening in Muscogee County and any challenges we've encountered. She indicated that we

didn't have many challenges outside of the need for placement for children with exceptional needs (extensive behavior issues, kids from DJJ, hard to place teenagers). The department is doing more recruitment efforts to attain more foster parents who are willing to accept and care for teenagers and large sibling groups. Mrs. Wadley and other staff attended a resource fair yesterday, in hopes of attracting new foster parents. The invitation to the Board Members to assist in referring people to become foster parents was given by Mrs. Wadley. In addition, she invited the Board Members to, if they hadn't already, review the Annual Board Report and provide any questions or concerns to her. The report was shared with the Board Members in last month's meeting email.

There will not be a January meeting. Mrs. Wadley has been invited by our Juvenile Court to attend a Child Maltreatment conference in San Diego, CA. Therefore, updates will be shared by Mrs. Wadley via email.

The Board was informed of the reason for the big delay in people receiving their food stamp benefits during the month of November. This was caused by the high influx of new applicants across the State of GA, but not enough staff to process them. The delay has been resolved and shouldn't be one that occurs again going forward. Our offices are still open on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for our clients to visit the lobby for any assistance needed.

The last item that Mrs. Wadley shared with the Board, was regarding General Assistance. She reported that \$14,100.00 has been allocated to help assist residents of Muscogee Co. with electrical, gas, and water services on a first come first served basis. The assistance will begin in January 2023. She will meet with the staff next Friday to determine a plan of how the assistance will be provided. Mrs. Wadley stressed that the funds would need to be stretched as far as possible, or until we can request additional funds in the upcoming/new fiscal year's budget in July. She added that assistance will only be provided to clients once a calendar year; however, if they return, a referral to other community partners will be done. The finalized plans will be provided to the Board via email. Dr. Smalls asked, if the purpose for providing general assistance the same as the purpose for it last year? To wit, Mrs. Wadley shared that the difference from last year, is rent will not be paid going forward since the state has a rental assistance program in place now. We will make referrals for rental assistance when we learn of their (clients) needs. An additional question asked by Dr. Smalls was -- "How do we go about helping those who receive the funds not have to come back for more?" Mrs. Wadley advised that once we have conversed with them to learn of their circumstances, it's possible for the department to open a Social Services case to use state funds to help pay for more than the one time we have assisted them. Additionally, we will assist with helping them learn to budget to avoid having to seek out assistance again. Mrs. Wadley added that 211 is compiling a data system to help recognize the chronic assistance shoppers. She emphasized that no one will be turned away with the department having the options to refer or open a Social Service case readily available to us.

Mrs. Melvin asked, about the updates regarding caseloads, and staffing shortages. Mrs. Wadley, answered, we don't necessarily have a shortage of case managers right now. When a

case manager resigns, we can quickly fill the position. We are well staffed right now. The caseloads are not small, especially for our investigators who are carrying about 20 cases per case manager. The normal amount is between 12-15 cases per case manager. With school about to be out, the time to process through the cases will be welcomed. The school systems are our largest referral source. Intake is one of the areas where it's hard to determine – one day we may get 10-12 reports and none the next day. She added, we are fairing pretty well so far compared to our size and the other like departments across the state.

Mrs. Wadley thanked Dr. Smalls' organization who has donated the many items to help serve our families. Dr. Smalls was grateful to learn of how Mrs. York and other Pastor wives and widows have diligently worked to contribute the way they have.

Mrs. Wadley also shared regarding the donation from Columbus Tech that will be divided with 8 other counties. In past years, Columbus Tech has given directly to the Clarke Howard Secret Santa Foundation but gave to the DFCS in their general area this year, reported Mrs. Wadley.

Mr. Nunn requested that Board Members thank any of those employed with WTVM. WTVM collected gifts and toys to be divided between our DCFS office and the Valley Rescue organization. Mrs. Wadley added the history behind WTVM annual giving.

Mrs. Melvin thanked the department for our work and for keeping the Board Members informed and wished us all a Wonderful Holiday season.

Mrs. Wadley updated Mrs. McIntosh regarding her recommendation, and then thanked all for attending and wished them a Happy Holiday season.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Next Board meeting will be February 16, 2023, at 1:00 via Microsoft Teams.

Tonika Wadley

Board County Secretary  
Tonika Wadley Director  
Muscogee County DFCS

Jennifer D. B. Melvin

Board Chairperson  
Jennifer Melvin  
Muscogee County DFCS