

CASS COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD MEETING

July 5, 2016

MINUTES

With quorum present, Chair Rasmussen called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.

Present: Arland Rasmussen, Ken Pawluk, Chad Peterson, Mary Scherling, Rick Steen, Brian Hagen, Glenn Ellingsberg

Presenter: Chip Ammerman, Director; Sarah Heinle, Auditor's Office

I. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Scherling made a motion to approve the June 6, 2016 Board minutes. Mr. Steen seconded it. Motion carried.

II. Preliminary Budget Report

Mr. Ammerman stated he is presenting a preliminary budget proposal that will not be finalized and will be reviewed at the August 1, 2016 meeting. He stated Sarah Heinle from the Auditor's Department is just starting to collect information from the County Auditor and State. Mr. Ammerman is simply requesting feedback from the Board on the proposal.

Cass County Social Services serves approximately 20% of the population in the county, with each department varying slightly from that percentage. In the last two years, the amount of people receiving Economic Assistance services has increased due to the addition of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the increase in the working poor. There has also been an increase of Child Welfare cases due to a rise in hardcore drug use and manufacturing.

Mr. Ammerman went on to discuss the expenditures explaining in 1998, there was a swap where the administrative cost in Economic Assistance was taken over by the county and the State took over cost associated with medical assistance. In 2016, Child Welfare costs were taken over by the State, which was approximately \$2,000,000. The expenditure appears to be cut by \$2,000,000, but the money was just removed from the expenditure; the cost of Social Services did not lessen. In 2017, the State will still be paying for those with a projected 3% increase. There will be a proposal in the 2017 legislature for the State to assume the complete funding of Social Services.

Mr. Ammerman explained over the past 15 years, the agency has been using some of the Social Welfare Fund to fund overall expenditures. He stated the agency does not intentionally over or under estimate, but instead looks at the costs. At the end of the year, the costs are actually less than projected. He also explained the benefits cost is based on a projection of what the Auditor is predicting. BlueCross BlueShield is indicating there will be an increase between 5-15%. The Auditor will use a 15% increase which is included in the proposal for the expenditures; a precise percentage will be made closer to the hearings.

Mr. Ammerman explained over the past 15 years (2002-2016), the agency has added \$526,517 to the Social Welfare Fund while intentionally trying to Deficit Spend. From 2009-2016, the agency used \$112,132 from the fund. The recommended amount for a balance in the Social Welfare Fund minimally is 10% of the Agency's budget. The Auditor prefers nothing below 14%. Currently, the Social Welfare Fund balance is at 18-20%.

The agency elects to have the three different Economic Assistance units: Generic, Aged and Disabled and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This division allows for more staff efficiencies by only learning the rules associated with a specific unit. If all cases were

equitably distributed across all Economic Assistance workers, staff would average 323 cases. Workers in Grand Forks County and Burleigh County average 219 and 214 respectively. The ACA cases makes up the majority of the increase from 2014 in Cass County. The case load standard of the State is 185.

With the implementation of the Qnomy system in Economic Assistance, the agency was able to retrieve data on the amount of service provided by Economic Assistance Support Staff on a daily basis. On average they see 230 clients (one client every two minutes); receive 227 phone calls (one call every two minutes); and assist 106 clients with documents to be scanned (one client every four and a half minutes). Scanning wait times during peak hours can range from 45 minutes to 1.25 hours. Comparison numbers from 2015 are not available as Qnomy was not in place. Economic Assistance Support Staff average 20 hours of overtime per week (approximately three hours per staff). In 2014, one full time position was moved to scanning with the previous tasks unable to be absorbed into the current staffing structure. This has led to those previous tasks, which include processing of returned mail and maintenance of foster care files, to get behind.

Mr. Ammerman continued to explain the Adult Services Division, despite being stable the last few years, is starting to see an increase in both Adult Protective Services and Home and Community Based Services. According to the City of Fargo population predictions, this will continue to increase. Even though the agency contracts services in the community, the agency still assists with the client's needs assessment of services and follow-up once implemented.

Family Services had remained stable until September 2015 when the agency saw a growth in Child Protection and the foster care program. The drug culture greatly permeates the cases and creates a very difficult scenario to engage with parents and prevent children from moving into foster care. Currently, the agency has one foster care licensing staff. The agency is seeing a continuous cycle of people discontinuing their license and the relicensing of new homes, which keeps the numbers relatively stable. We had 32 families that became licensed foster parents the past year. There have been 100 people who have inquired about foster care but the agency was unable to re-contact due to inadequate staffing.

Currently, the agency has two attorneys and two legal assistants in the Legal Services department. Legal Services' numbers correspond with the increase of Child Welfare cases as there are more children entering the legal process for protection. The numbers of petitions being completed has almost doubled since 2014. Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), which is very intense legal work to process, has also increased since 2014. At this time, there is no crossover from the State's Attorney's Office. The State's Attorney is receiving an additional attorney later this year, but that is in part to their high caseloads and it is undetermined if they would be able to assist Legal Services. There is a probability that the agency's Legal Services may decline prosecution of some cases due to not being able to represent. This will lead to children deemed as deprived being sent back home.

Mr. Ammerman projected the state budget cap for the 2017 budget at \$12,942,459. The Auditor's office projects the 2017 Revenue will be \$12,888,104. With the reductions of the Red River Children's Advocacy Center (RRCAC) sponsorship, scanner and copier replacements, there would at a \$6,600 difference. Mr. Ammerman is recommending to discontinue the RRCAC Sponsorship. He stated the RRCAC utilizes our staff for a .25 position that is stationed there for advocacy work and short-term case management for our families that are seen at the RRCAC. We also assist in doing forensic interviews when their interviewers are unavailable. Our costs are not fully reimbursed by the RRCAC, but the agency does receive \$25,000 (\$22,000 minus the sponsorship) for the backup forensic work done. There will be no reimbursement from RRCAC if we discontinue the sponsorship. The cost of the position is already included in the agency's expenditures; the agency just would not see the additional funds in the revenues. The Board

voiced their concerns about wanting to keep the revenue, which Mr. Ammerman stated he is more than willing to not discontinue if the Board chooses.

Mr. Peterson requested that, when time allows, he would like to see the In-Lieu of rent fee to an actual number or have them start paying rent. Ms. Heinle stated that it is a formula based on the amount of space we use and the case load for which type of space is used for each case. Mr. Ammerman explained there are two different amounts: one having to do strictly with rent payment; the other is cost allocation, which are the intangibles, such as the Auditor's office.

Mr. Ammerman stated the recommended additional positions for 2017 would include: one Economic Assistance Support Staff, four Economic Assistance Eligibility Workers, .5 increase for Foster Care Licensor SW II position to create 1 FTE, .2 FTE increase in the Child Care Self-Declared position to create 1 FTE and a .5 FTE Attorney, resulting in a cost of \$435,588. There would be an additional request of \$42,800 for equipment and an increase in temp positions for foster care transportation, increase the Consortium contract and additional service to Adult Services clients and Support Staff temp position. The total cost for increased expenditures for the 2017 budget would be \$478,388. Mr. Ammerman anticipates taking out of the Social Welfare Fund \$39,474. However, that is without the adjustments for the computers. Mr. Ammerman also stated if the State takes over the funding of Social Services, the Commission would need to decide what to do with the Social Welfare Fund since it is county tax dollars.

Mr. Ammerman was asked how the requested added positions compares to the Eide Bailly study completed in 2015. Mr. Ammerman stated from his recollection, Eide Bailly was not making a review of the caseloads or number of staff. The only thing they recommended was not to add Support Staff until some of the recommendations took effect. Ms. Scherling has also requested that Eide Bailly return and present an update to the Board on the follow through of the recommendations made to Social Services.

Mr. Peterson referred to a report that listed the amount of hours and dollars of overtime, stating three staff are completing 70% of the overtime in Economic Assistance. His concern would be that there would not be enough work for an addition of four staff in that department. Mr. Ammerman shared he was unable to give clarification as he was not familiar with the report Mr. Peterson was referring to.

Mr. Ellingsberg requested additional time for the next meeting due to the budget discussion, as well as follow-up questions he has regarding how the computer discussion went after the webinar in June with Deloitte. Mr. Ammerman will look at scheduling the next meeting for 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. to allow for the additional questions.

Chair Rasmussen distributed a letter to the Board regarding a meeting by the Refugee Services Advisory Committee that he and Mr. Ammerman attended.

III. **Operating Report**

There was no discussion on the report provided.

IV. **Adjournment**

Mr. Pawluk made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:18 pm. Mr. Peterson seconded it. Motion carried.



Arland Rasmussen, Chair
Cass County Social Services Board



Blair Hodge, Recorder