

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES
July 16, 2020
DDS Central Office
Little Rock, Arkansas

The called meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held July 16, 2020 at the DDS Central Office via conference call. The meeting convened at 3:00 p.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Chair Darrell Pickney, Sally Hardin, Artie Jones, Randy Laverty, Suzann McCommon, Linda Selman, and David Rosegrant.

STAFF PRESENT: DDS Director Melissa Stone, Jeff Gonyea, Steve Farmer, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Mark Wargo, Tammy Benbrook, Avis Lane, Dale Woodall, Thomas Tarpley, and Bryan Redditt.

OTHERS PRESENT: Attorney General Representatives Sara Farris, Jan Fortney, Rose Seawright, Missy Overton, Judy Wilson, Melissa Douglas, and Annette Matthews.

Mr. Pickney called the meeting to order and advised the purpose was to address implementing a safe visitation policy for the human development centers. The statewide parents group met with DDS to develop a visitation policy which was scheduled to begin July 1st. However, shortly before this date the Department of Health issued new guidelines which included a 28-day waiting period for visitation following any positive cases of COVID-19. He shared concern that such a waiting period after any positive case on campus would ultimately cancel out the possibility of visitation. During conversations with Mr. Pickney, family members of HDC clients have emphasized the need for a safe policy which will allow them to visit with their loved ones. Mr. Pickney proposed that as the HDCs are divided by living units, visitation should be allowed with clients whose units have no positive cases. Mr. Pickney further proposed that he request a meeting with Governor Hutchinson and the Department of Health and asked that the current guidelines be amended to accommodate this recommendation and asked for the Board's support.

Mr. Laverty asked for clarification on how the proposed policy would work. Ms. McCommon cited she is in favor of allowing visitation but has concerns regarding staff coverage as employees are sometimes required to provide coverage in more than one unit.

Ms. Stone advised visitation began at Warren and Arkadelphia on July 1st and is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2 weeks at Booneville and Jonesboro. DDS is actively engaged with Mr. Pickney and the Department of Health to resume visitation. Unfortunately, visitation has been delayed at Conway due to the number of positive cases. There is also a concerning number of staff who are out either through call in, positive test results, or due to quarantine while they await test results. Ms. Stone pointed out Ms. McCommon's concern over employee coverage as floating staff is being utilized.

Mr. Pickney noted that a non-positive parent/guardian who complies with the proposed guidelines should be allowed to make an appointment and visit with their loved one outside of the living unit.

Ms. Stone expressed her understanding of the parent/guardian concerns and supports visitation but also recognized the importance of advice provided by the infectious disease experts. In addition, she stresses every possible safety precaution must be taken to prevent the virus from being brought into the facility or taken back into the community.

Ms. McCommon asked for clarification from Mr. Pickney if she was correct on what would be conveyed to Governor Hutchinson and the Department of Health by the Board on behalf of the parents/guardians; with that being parents/guardians view the benefit of contact with family outweighs potential risks. Mr. Pickney advised that is what he is being told and noted several parents on the call may wish to address the Board. Ms. McCommon also asked if there is a possibility this policy may jeopardize the safety of the clients whose parents/guardians the Board or staff have not heard from at this time. Mr. Pickney acknowledged that anything is possible.

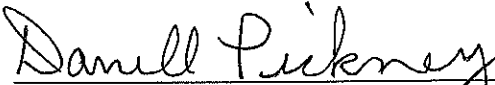
Ms. McCommon made a motion that the Board support Mr. Pickney's meeting with Governor Hutchinson and the Department of Health to convey the discussion of today's meeting and work towards a solution which will allow parents/guardians to visit their loved ones. Dr. Selman seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Dr. Selman asked for clarification on current visitation and Ms. Stone advised visits have occurred at Warren and Arkadelphia.

Annette Matthews advised that the parents group agreed to undergo the same screening process as staff and visitation would occur away from the living unit.

Mr. Pickney called for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Rosegrant made the motion. Ms. McCommon seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 3:27 p.m.

ATTEST:


Mr. Darrell Pickney, Chair, Board of DDS


Executive Secretary