

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES
February 22, 2023

The regular meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held February 22, 2023 via Zoom. The meeting convened at 10:30 a.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Suzann McCommon, Randy Laverty, Becky Mitchum, Linda Patterson, David Rosegrant, Michelle Loe, and Stephanie Heidelberg.

STAFF PRESENT: DDS Director Melissa Weatherton, DHS Secretary Kristi Putnam, Jeff Gonyea, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Diane Keith, Mark Wargo, Linda Scales, Jennifer Berry, Avis Lane, Tammy Benbrook, Thomas Tarpley, Dale Woodall, Kathleen Hoskins, Brian Redditt, Daisy Reyes, and Jerry Hodge.

OTHERS PRESENT: Jan Fortney, Deborah Rainwater, Kimberly Dodd, Rita Hoover, Elaine Wooten, Carole Sherman, Brian Summerhill, Heather Shrader, Reagan Stafford and Tom Masseur of Disability Rights Arkansas.

Ms. McCommon called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance. She then introduced DHS Secretary Kristi Putnam who shared background information regarding her career as a classroom teacher and her transition to human services. Secretary Putnam advised she looks forward to working with the Board.

Ms. McCommon called for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 16, 2022 regular meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Laverty made a motion that the minutes be approved. Mr. Rosegrant seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

The Physical Management Subcommittee met at 10:00 on this date to discuss the extension of lease 23-000-N9182 (attachment 1) involving acreage utilized for hay production on Conway Human Development Center property. The Subcommittee moved to approve the extension for one year at the current rate. In one year, the lease will be renegotiated with a potential rate increase. Ms. Heidelberg seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

The Superintendents of the human development centers shared items of interest regarding campus activities, hiring efforts, and construction updates. Conway HDC Superintendent Sarah Murphy highlighted their recent Valentine's Day Prom which involved a great deal of family participation. She also noted CHDC won first place for their area in the Polar Plunge Challenge to benefit Special Olympics. Arkadelphia HDC Superintendent Kerry Gambill noted the residents will make 600-750 Razorback ceramic banks this year for the Elks who in turn make an annual donation to the HDCs. The center recently held a successful walk-a-thon. Jonesboro HDC Superintendent Diane Keith advised the center celebrated World Essential Workers Day and the Elks donated instruments for the music room that the clients enjoy very much. Southeast Arkansas HDC Superintendent Mark Wargo announced American sign language training is being added for staff. Booneville HDC Superintendent Jeff Gonyea highlighted BHDC's 50th Anniversary Celebration being held on April 14th. He also noted BHDC won first place for their area in the Polar Plunge Challenge to benefit Special Olympics.

DDS Deputy Director Thomas Tarpley advised the Booneville Human Development Center's American Rescue Plan Act funding application was approved. An awarded totaling \$568,150 has been granted for a drinking water infrastructure project. Bids from architects are currently being sought with construction to begin by the end of the year.

Ms. Weatherton advised the new year has been off to a busy start with the new Governor, DHS Secretary, and the Legislature. There is no legislation that directly effects DDS or the human development centers.

DDS recently met with Guidehouse regarding the human development center employee satisfaction project. Surveys were conducted to determine if the HDC structure should be changed or if different practices need to be implemented. Ms. Weatherton, Assistant Director Tammy Benbrook, and the Superintendents were pleased with the positive turnout. Information gathered details the top reasons staff choose employment at an HDC as well as insight into possible recruitment and retention practices. The implementation phase will begin soon and Ms. Weatherton plans to include non HDC staff in this process.

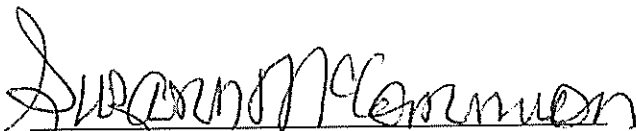
Ms. Weatherton addressed the DDS budget noting the general revenue received for fiscal year 2023 is approximately \$500,000 less than fiscal year 2016. Operating expenses continue to increase. She advised, however, that the DDS finance team's efficiency for managing funds is responsible for savings, the ability to do construction within our own budget, and to raise salaries. The DDS finance team will closely monitor the budget and keep the Board updated.

Conway HDC parent and advocate Deborah Rainwater addressed the Board to express her appreciation for CHDC Superintendent Sarah Murphy and her staff for their efforts during the hiring freeze.

Parent and advocate Rita Hoover also expressed appreciation for the Board and staff. She advised that as she continues to work with advocates across the country, she finds that other states struggle to keep their centers open and often look to Arkansas for guidance.

With no further business, Ms. McCommon called for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Rosegrant made a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Mitchum seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m.

ATTEST:



Suzann McCommon
Chair, Board of DDS


Executive Secretary