

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES
May 3, 2023

The regular meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held May 3, 2023 at the Conway Human Development Center. The meeting convened at 10:39 a.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

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

STAFF PRESENT: DDS Director Melissa Weatherton, Jeff Gonyea, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Diane Keith, Mark Wargo, Avis Lane, Tammy Benbrook, Thomas Tarpley, Dale Woodall, Kathleen Hoskins, Daisy Reyes, Raven Fuller, and Cathy Guffey.

OTHERS PRESENT: Deborah Rainwater, Kimberly Dodd, Rita Hoover, Terry Johnson, Troy Clark of Stephens, Inc., and Reagan Stanford and Tom Masseur of Disability Rights Arkansas.

Ms. McCommon called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance.

Ms. McCommon called for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 22, 2023 regular meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Rosegrant made a motion that the minutes be approved. Ms. Loe seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Stephens Investment Manager Troy Clark provided history and an update on the Board's investment account since acquiring it ten years ago. A structured investment ladder consisting of cash and CDs was devised and has proven to be a safe investment strategy for the funds. Ms. Loe made a motion to continue this strategy. Mr. Laverty 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 that cheerleaders have been added to Special Olympics activities and the squad received an award for second place in a recent competition. She also gave an overview of the upcoming Beyond The Borders conference scheduled for August 3rd and 4th. The Board will attend the first day of the conference and conduct the quarterly meeting on this date as well. Jonesboro HDC Superintendent Diane Keith advised the center observed Homesteading Week with multiple activities including making soap and planting vegetables. Booneville HDC Superintendent Jeff Gonyea has focused on staff appreciation by implementing recommendations from the Guidehouse Wellbeing Pillar. The BHDC 50th Anniversary celebration is scheduled for May 12th at 1:00. Arkadelphia HDC Superintendent Kerry Gambill noted the center has completed the generator project for their multipurpose building. They have also added a fruit smoothie bar to complement the weekly coffee bar. Southeast Arkansas HDC Superintendent Mark Wargo announced completion of phase 1 of the recreational center and that expansions in the living units have begun. He also shared an update on the center's second book that will be published.

Tom Masseur, Executive Director, and Reagan Stanford, Abuse and Neglect Managing Attorney of Disability Rights Arkansas addressed the Board. Mr. Masseur noted that his agency is part of the protection and advocacy system network and as a result they monitor human development centers

across the state. He requested a status update on camera installation at the human development centers as recommended by the Behavioral Consultation Committee. He also provided an incident overview compiled from IRIS and OLTC reports. Mr. Masseau wanted to ensure allegations of abuse/neglect are not only being brought to the Board's attention, but that the Board is addressing the incidents appropriately. He also expressed the goal of DRA is to work with the Board to resolve these issues. Ms. Stanford reiterated Mr. Masseau's concerns citing their goal is for clients to be safe and live in dignity. She added that camera installation would not only protect clients but also assist in the collection of evidence necessary for termination and prosecution. Mr. Rosegrant noted that the incident overview report only contained allegations of abuse and should also include information regarding the staff's actions to address the issues. Ms. Stanford agreed it would be beneficial to include follow-up information in future reports. At this time DDS Assistant Director Tammy Benbrook shared information regarding the staff's incident investigative process. After discussion it was determined that additional follow-up information contained in reports would be beneficial to both the Board and DRA. With that Mr. Laverty invited Mr. Masseau to share his thoughts on services provided for clients in the community as opposed to services provided in the human development centers. Mr. Masseau noted that with a proper state infrastructure in place, he was of the opinion that at some point in the future individuals with developmental disabilities could live in the community with support and services. Mr. Laverty expressed individual special needs warranted the necessity of human development centers. It was determined that future dialogue would be beneficial.

Parent and advocate Rita Hoover shared that her son was a human development center client for seventeen years. After Ms. Hoover obtained clarification on the nature of IRIS reports, parent and advocate Terry Johnson asked if DRA had compiled an incident overview report for community providers similar to the one compiled for the human development centers. Mr. Masseau advised they had not, but noted it was something he could look into. Ms. Hoover expressed hope for growth and expansion of human development centers as the level of care provided is a necessity. She shared information regarding the adverse effect of centers closing in Georgia and clients being moved to the community for care. Ms. McCommon added that the Board has always been in favor of an all-inclusive continuum of care for disabled clients and fully supports the human development centers. Parent Kimberly Dodd spoke on the personal impact the human development centers have had on her family and shared the story of her son's initial admission to Southeast Arkansas HDC. He is now thriving at Arkadelphia HDC. Ms. Dodd also noted that receiving community care was not a successful option for her son.

Ms. Weatherton commended DDS staff for their efforts to build a continuum of services through the community and ICF placement including the human development centers. She pointed out that in addition to overseeing the five human development centers DDS provides services to over 70,000 people with developmental disabilities through Waiver, the PASSEs, and community providers. She accepted the data contained in the report provided by DRA. She acknowledged instances of staff being terminated because of substantiated allegations. She also acknowledged that unfortunately incidents such as these occur in any setting where there is a vulnerable population. In turn, she rejected the criticism staff often receive along with the challenging requirement of having to repeatedly explain themselves. Ms. Weatherton brought attention to areas of improvement such as the decrease in restraint use, an increase in staffing numbers, and advancements in CPR and CNA training. Medical care is also improving as a result of APRNs on staff. She also discussed the challenges faced when providing care for clients who also have behavioral health needs.

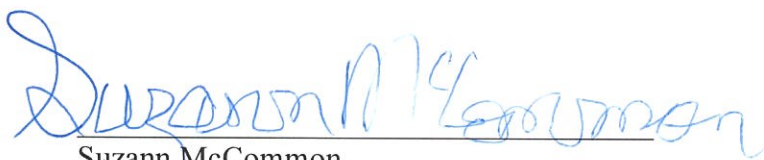
Ms. Weatherton made the Board aware that Representative Jack Ladyman was instrumental in securing \$8,000,000 in funding from reserve funds for HDC construction. She ended with an update on the public health emergency wind down. Beginning April 1, 2023 DDS was no longer required to keep clients enrolled in Medicaid. The first disenrollment began on May 1st and will occur monthly until September. Children on TEFRA, CES Waiver clients and clients residing in ICFs were extended until June 15th to allow families more time to submit their packets to avoid disenrollment.

DDS Deputy Director Thomas Tarpley gave an update on the installation of cameras at the human development centers and provided an explanation of the construction and IT processes involved. Booneville HDC's are scheduled to be operational in approximately two weeks and Southeast Arkansas HDC will take approximately four weeks. The network fiber structure is underway and must be completed prior to camera installation at Conway HDC. Appropriations are scheduled to be received at the beginning of the next fiscal year to begin the design phase at Arkadelphia and Jonesboro HDCs.

Ms. McCommon requested that Dale Woodall compile a list of the current leases to distribute to the the Board.

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. Loe seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 12:42 p.m.

ATTEST:


Suzann McCommon
Chair, Board of DDS


Executive Secretary