

HARFORD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Citizen Advisory Board
Minutes of April 17th, 2025
In Person

Members Present: Andrée Mountain, Kourtney Cluster, , Daniel Rusin, Cynthia Phillips (“C”), Christine Gerhardt, , Alicia Hamilton, Pat Weaver, Council Rep Debbie Button

Members Absent: Jim Kuterbach, Pamela Smith, Vicki Jones, Angela Mangione, Dea Galloway

Staff Present: Cora Grishkot

Guests: Jazma and Paul Coates (arrived at 6:20pm)

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p. m.

1. Approval of Minutes

- The minutes from the March 20th, 2025, meeting were reviewed.
- The March 20th, 2025, minutes were unanimously approved upon the motion of Alicia Hamilton with a second from Kourtney Cluster.

2. Board Chair Report (Andrée Mountain)

- Welcome guests Jazma and Paul Coates and Council representative Debbie Buttons.
 - Members took the opportunity to introduce themselves.
- Board Member status
 - Andrée spoke with Jim Kuterbach who is having some medical issues. He requested that his seat be held until issues are resolved.
 - Request approved and will be revisited in September. Andree will cover the finance report until that time.
 - The board also worked in partnership with MASSB to submit a Torch Technologies grant application for \$10,000
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3. Director's Report (Cora Grishkot)

- General news:
 - Legislative session is done. Policies to note: Social workers will still be required to take a test to get licensed.
 - Budget notification: As of now, there will be no impact to the 2026 budget. This could change based on federal mandates however.
 - The TANF grant is expected to have a 20% reduction over the next 3-5 years. The local agency is able to absorb this change without a reduction in services.
 - Final preparations for the Trauma Institute are underway.
 - Lots of staff on medical leave currently. FIA staff is currently down by 30% but positions are being filled.
 - SNAP evaluation just completed and agency performed well.

Kourtney asked about fees associated with Foster Parent College. There was previously a contract through DSS that paid for foster parent credential hours that is no longer available. Kourtney wants to know if any other resources are available to help foster parents pay for classes.

- Agency partnered with SWN for the Absent Parent Program which 'will provide job training and certification funding through a Block grant.
- Agency request
 - Health and Safety month is September/October this year. Cora is looking for educators to present to safe on holistic health topics. Presentations will be virtual for 30 minutes. Several topic suggestions and people were made.

4. General Discussion Topics

- Bylaws
 - Andree, Christine and Dan reviewed the handbook and bylaws and identified several discrepancies. Christine is going to go back through and update to rectify. The plan is to present the bylaw revisions during the May meeting. Vote on changes will take place in June. Handbook updates may wait until September.
 - The strategic planning document may require revisions based on updates to bylaws and handbook. More discussion postponed until the next meeting.
- Nominating Committee
 - Andree provided an explanation of the nominating committee. Nomination for board officers should be based on skills and knowledge of board operations.
 - Vote will take place in June
 - Alicia, Pat, CC, and Andree will be on the nominating committee.
 - Nominations will be made in May and voted on in June.

1. New Business

2. Old Business

- CY 2025 Focus
 - Alicia brought up the topic of which committee is responsible for overseeing our advocacy goals and leading the rest of the board in those efforts?
 - Alicia made the recommendation that the PR committee should be responsible for this initiative. The Events & Fundraising committee will work with the PR committee when fundraising efforts require community support and advocacy.
 - The matrix needs to be updated.
 - Committee charts need to be updated.

3. Committee Reports

- CQI
 - Health/Safety week will be held during September/October
 - Staff appreciation picnic will be tentatively the 2nd Friday in September. CQI is currently planning. There will be games and a food truck.
 - Requested board support for soliciting raffle basket donations.

- Planning a customer feedback survey in the fall.
- Found funding for filtered water at the 2 S. Bond St. location.
- Cookies with Cora has been well-received. Staff are participating.
- Committee wants to establish food pantries at all DSS office locations. Meeting was held this week.
- Finance
 - Andrée reported that there have been no expenditures or changes since the previous month. Previous balances were \$7,160.00 & \$6023.92.
 - Kinship program has used \$3k stipend towards cribs, beds, and fire detectors.
- Events and Fundraising
 - Pat shared historical account of past fundraising events. Members shared concerns about upcoming fundraising event and time/energy spent on fundraising as a whole in reference to other board responsibilities.
 - Alicia moved to postpone discussion of the the putt-putt golf fundraiser until September and new members join the committee, as Alicia and Pat's term ending in June. Kourtney seconded the motion and the motion carried - 6-0-0.
 - Dan joined the committee. One more committee member is needed.
 - CC introduced guests Jazma and Paul Coates who are the founders/directors of Journey of Life Behavioral Health. Paul provided an overview of their organization.
 - Alicia reviewed DSS matrix needs with the Coates' and how their potential financial support could fulfill the needs.
 - Cora offered the opportunity for the DSS staff visit their location on a regular basis and invited them to present at the Director's meeting.
 - The Coates pledged to donate \$3,000 to support Harford Family Assistance Fund and the needs on the current DSS matrix.
 - Retail donation drop-boxes were purchased by Alicia & Kourtney for CC's fundraising initiative. She will begin placing them once Alicia provides the box sign.
 - Pat & Alicia identified 26 local grants that could be applied for.
 - Kourtney created two letters to be used for a letter-writing campaign suggested by Dan Rusin to introduce our mission and solicit donations from local businesses.
 - The committee proposed two collection drives-one in the spring and one in the fall- to gather in-kind donation supplies to fulfill other matrix needs. Committee will oversee the collection.
 - Cora requested that youth committee be involved with any future fundraising events.
- Public Relations
 - No meeting was held and there are no updates.
 - Alicia suggested selecting a new chair for the committee and would like to attend the next meeting to share current PR resources with the committee, prior to departing the Board in June.

- Kourtney suggested connecting the DSS Facebook page coordinator with our FB page coordinator so we can share what they post.
- Board Administration
 - We will have three vacancies on the board as of July 1.
 - New board member applications need to be reviewed.
 - Andree asked Christine to join the committee in anticipation of Alicia and Pat departing in June. One more committee member is needed. Should be a senior member of the board.
 - Alicia is maintaining the shared drive up-to-date with meeting documents, board member attendance, and new board member applications. A POC to maintain the drive is needed immediately.
- Legislative
 - The Maryland General Assembly closed April 8, 2025.
 - Committee needs one more member. Dan stepped down from the committee to join the Events and Fundraising Committee. Two members still remain.

Action Items

- N/A

4. Next Meetings

- May 15th, 2025. (Andree will not be in attendance.)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 pm.

The next meeting will be **Thursday, May 15th, 2025, at 2. S. Bond Street, Suite 300, Bel Air, MD 21014**

Respectfully submitted by: Alicia Hamilton