



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES

April 1, 2024 • Virtual Public Session Minutes

MEMBERS

STAFF

Brandon Bragg
BOARD CHAIR

Michele Levy
BOARD VICE CHAIR

Rishi Nixon
BOARD SECRETARY

Kendell Battle (absent)

Anthony Carter

Shadrene Howard
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Dawn Luedtke
COUNTY COUNCILMEMBER

Swapnika Madhavaram

Larniece McKoy Moore

Loveline Tangwan
OUTREACH COMMITTEE CHAIR

Yuma Tomes

2 VACANT SEATS

Oscar Mensah
COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICER

Hannah Shaw
BOARD STAFF

Kristin Cummings
COUNTY COUNCIL STAFF

Caroline Davenport
COUNTY COUNCIL STAFF

Yvonne Iscandari
SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR OF ELIGIBILITY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Rodney Glasgow
CENTRAL MANAGER, ELIGIBILITY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Sean Gibson
HEALTH INSURANCE MANAGER, ELIGIBILITY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bragg called the April public session of the Montgomery County Board of Social Services to order at 4:03 p.m., upon reaching a quorum of members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve the minutes of the Board's March public session with no amendments, by B. Bragg, seconded by S. Madhavaram, adopted with unanimous consent.

PRESENTATION: OFFICE OF ELIGIBILITY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

DHHS staff Yvonne Iscandari, Rodney Glasgow, and Sean Gibson gave the board a comprehensive update on the county Office of Eligibility and Support Services' present state of affairs.

Rodney Glasgow presented on OESS' income support work, compliance requirements in relation to COVID funds, and their various programs' regulatory and fiscal relationships with federal and state entities.

Sean Gibson presented on the organizational structure of OESS, each program's administration, and initiatives for the Board's leadership, including:

- Securing more multilingual materials and support for county residents in less commonly-spoken languages.
- Lobbying to keep Montgomery County's call center model, as opposed to the proposed centralized state work-share model (which has not worked out well for county residents in the past).
- Advocating for operating budget items next year to replace contract customer service representatives, who have high turnover, with merit staff, in whom lengthy professional development investment pays off much more.
- Funding for more staff development and training due to a shortage in experienced workers.

Yvonne Iscandari added that along with OESS' communicated priorities, the Board's facilitation of collaboration with community-based partners in social service areas continues to be critical.

B. Bragg thanked the administrators for their presentations and asked for a clarification on post-COVID service needs. Ms. Iscandari explained that although the lifting of the COVID emergency has resulted in many residents being rendered ineligible for COVID-era aid, case loads — especially for cash and nutrition assistance — have remained well above what they were pre-pandemic as some waivers have been implemented to smoothly transition residents from support programs.

M. Levy asked about the board's potential role in advocating for multilingual materials. Ms. Iscandari clarified that while 74% of residents speak Spanish, and languages like Amharic, French, Vietnamese, and Chinese are also included, OESS' goal is for every person that has a need for service to be able to read service information in the language they best understand. The Board's involvement in this could be working to find people in the community that can interpret in the language they speak.

Y. Tomes asked about how outreach is done to the community about these programs. Ms. Iscandari recognized the communication division's extraordinary productivity, holding over 50 outreach events held in the past year. Children of undocumented immigrants have recently been made eligible to access the county's social services, and OESS staff have been working to find the children in this population most in need.

R. Nixon asked for clarification on advocacy to keep the county's current call center model as opposed to the state work-share model and how the board could help. Rodney Glasgow explained that the state work-share model would route all Maryland residents' case issues through state centers, who would then forward necessary cases to county offices. When the work-share program was briefly trialed during the pandemic, OESS' experience was that state centers were much more prone to processing Montgomery County cases incorrectly — especially for immigrant residents. Rodney Glasgow presented case data to support this. OESS' view is the county government has the capacity to handle its unique resident population's issues much more effectively than the state.

Dr. Mensah added that he and Ms. Iscandari would take an initial pass at advocacy, and if necessary, the Board would be mobilized to dial up lobbying efforts to oppose the work-share model.

The Board opened discussion on initiatives related to OESS' priorities. **S. Howard** suggested, from academic experience, that partnering with language departments in colleges and universities could yield student volunteers with the linguistic expertise to interpret to county residents. **S. Madhavaram** proposed partnering with local case management agencies as a resource for experienced professionals qualified to assist county residents with accessing social services. **R. Nixon** suggested the Montgomery County Volunteer Center — especially MCPS Student Service Learning (SSL) hour opportunities — as a quick and easy way to get more speakers of diverse languages.

A. Carter requested more information on OESS' temporary staffing issue. Yvonne Iscandari clarified that intensive training is required for case work, and high turnover in temporary employees means OESS' investments in professional development and training — nearly one year's worth — is typically wasted on employees that don't stay to use their skills.

COMMITTEE SESSIONS

B. Bragg reviewed the outreach committee's discussion on partnering with other community organizations, initiation of work on OESS' multilingual materials, and inviting more representatives from other county boards to discuss collaboration.

S. Howard was elected chair of the legislative committee. She reviewed its discussion of the OESS' multilingual materials issue and **D. Luedtke**'s report on state legislation from her personal bill tracker.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION to adjourn the April public session of the Montgomery County Board of Social Services, by **B. Bragg**, seconded by **A. Carter**, adopted by unanimous consent at 5:45 p.m.

NEXT MEETING to be held virtually on Monday, May 6th, 2024, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

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mcbs@montgomerycountymd.gov
