

April 1, 2021

The regular meeting of the Camden County Board of Social Services was held virtually on Wednesday, March 17, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. in the office of the Board at 600 Market Street, Camden, New Jersey, with James H. Rhodes, Chair, presiding. The following members were present:

Via Teleconference: Virginia Betteridge, Vice Chairperson; Sharrae Morman, Secretary/Treasurer; Gwen DeVera

Also present were: Christine Hentisz, Director; Lauwana Martin, Deputy Director; Martin F. McKernan Jr., Esquire, Board Counsel (via teleconference); Edward Hill, Esquire (via teleconference); Paulette Konopka, Fiscal Officer (via teleconference); Christine Colbert, Principal Personnel Technician (via teleconference); Jaritza Nunez, Clerk Typist 3; Rich Behm, IT Director;

Also, in attendance via teleconference were various employees of the Board including Tamila Carr, Sharifa Lawson, Precious Diggs, Nicole Barringer, Tyniquah Mullen, Allegra Reed, Simone Moore, Audrey Watkins-Kizee, Cerina Muse, Dannielle Bonner, Shannon Davis, Latonya Sandy, Elizabeth Black and Cynthia Montanez.

At 12:00 p.m., a quorum being present, Mr. Rhodes called the meeting to order, and announced that in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, the Courier Post and the Philadelphia Inquirer newspapers were notified of the Board Meeting, that notice of the agenda was posted in a prominent location at 600 Market Street and that the County Clerk was notified.

Mr. Rhodes requested approval of the following items:

- Minutes of the February Board Meeting.
- The listed expenditures from both Clearing and Administration Accounts.
- The payment of salaries and traveling expenses for March.
- Requisition from the County Treasurer for administration expenses for April.
- Movement of funds to be requisitioned from the State and County Treasurers less monies on hand for assistance payments for the month of April.

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to approve.

Ms. Betteridge moved to approve. Ms. DeVera seconded the motion, and there being no discussion on the motion, a vote was taken and the motion was unanimously adopted.

**OPEN SESSION
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to open the meeting for public participation. Ms. Betteridge moved to open the Public Participation portion of the Open Session, seconded by Ms. DeVera and the motion was unanimously adopted.

Mr. Rhodes went on to ask if there were any members of the public wishing to address the Board.

Ms. Precious Diggs stated that, in her opinion, the Agency is not being transparent as to contact tracing. She stated that when a person tests positive it is not necessary to give the name, but that the Agency should make sure that the surrounding employees are aware to take proper precautions. She also stated she had tested positive for COVID in January, adding that in December of 2020 she emailed the Personnel Department stating there was an employee coughing and sneezing profusely and she never heard anything back from personnel regarding her inquiry. She added that during that time the coworker came back to work the second day and abruptly left the agency around 9:45 a.m. and approximately 7 days later Ms. Diggs tested positive for COVID. When she had COVID she told the Camden County Health Department of the two people she had contact with at the Agency, but that they were never contacted. She said that she did not have a problem coming into work, but that she did have a problem coming into an unsafe environment.

Mr. Rhodes thanked Ms. Diggs and advised he is aware what has been going on and is in contact with Administration and the health department. Mr. Rhodes stated he was not aware of Ms. Diggs situation back in January. Mr. Rhodes stated we take the safety of the employees and public very seriously and that we will continue to invest in cleaning and sanitizing the Agency. Mr. Rhodes also stated COVID vaccines are available to all employees. Ms. Hentisz stated she will look into why Ms. Diggs was not contacted by Personnel, adding that in keeping the employees safe the Agency is cleaning throughout the day and asks employees to notify their administrator if a spot has not been cleaned. She added that the Agency has been limiting client access to the building and allows staff to work from home on a rotating basis. Ms. Hentisz stated employees are in 2 days with 3 days at home, adding that the Agency does contact tracing internally and by having the Health Department talk to the employee who became positive. Ms. Hentisz stated the cleaning throughout the building starts at 9:30 a.m. and its approximately every 2 hours, and that if this is not being done throughout each department the Agency, we must be notified in order for the situation to be addressed.

Ms. Nicole Barringer stated she has two concerns. Her first concern was that, on December 22, 2020 she tested positive for COVID. She said that she contacted the Personnel Department and that then she received a call from Health Department. The Health Department asked her if she had any direct contact which she said yes and gave the two employee names, although she reported that the two employees were never notified by the Health Department of the direct contact. Her second concern is that recently a coworker tested positive and that coworker contacted her and another coworker directly to advise us since she knew no one would contact us with this information. She said that this is a huge problem with employees not being contacted to be notified.

Mr. Rhodes stated the Health Department has different criteria for when they contact a person who has had possible contact. He said, however, that the Agency will follow up with the Health Department and submit a request to see what did or did not happen. Ms. Hentisz added she would contact Ms. Barringer to get the names and ascertain what had happened.

OPEN SESSION

Ms. Sharifa Lawson stated she had concerns about the cleaning. She said that she has not seen the cleaning crew clean the desks, adding that she cleans her desk with her own spray and wipes. Also, she would like to know if there is a generic letter that can be sent to the people being exposed without violating HIPPA. Mr. Rhodes replied that the policy of the Agency is to make a determination and then notify those who have had close contact with the person to self-quarantine. Ms. Lawson stated she had one more concern about people who come in wearing a mask but not wearing one in the common areas. Mr. Rhodes stated that is something that should not be happening. Mr. Rhodes also stated the Agency has cleaning supplies for employees, which are available to be used in addition to the work of the cleaning crew. Ms. Hentisz stated there are cleaning supplies that can be requested through office services which includes wipes and she will check if there is spray for individual employees. Ms. Hentisz also stated that UV lights were given to each Supervisor which employees can use to sanitize within their departments.

Ms. Tamila Carr stated she would like to know why Supervisors were required to quarantine but other people did not. She stated her son lives in a dormitory and is tested every week, asking whether this could be a possible solution for the Agency. In the Essex County Board of Social Services, she said that employees were tested every other week and now they are tested once a month. Mr. Rhodes stated that the County has multiple vaccination sites available to all employees to protect them from COVID adding, however, that getting tested really is not a guarantee since you can get tested but when you leave the testing site then be in contact with someone who is positive. Ms. Carr questioned why only certain individuals were told to leave last week and self-quarantine. Ms. Hentisz stated that the request for people to leave was based on an internal investigation and with advice from the Health Department. Ms. Hentisz stated the people were given a date to get tested based on the date of contact. Depending on when the employee was in the building, the Health Department gave them a date to get tested. Ms. Carr questioned Ms. Hentisz stating we do not have the staff to complete all the work and she heard that the Agency is being sanctioned by the State due to timeliness for not completing the work. Ms. Hentisz replied that the Agency is not being sanctioned by the State. Ms. Hentisz stated there were concerns on the State level before the pandemic regarding timeliness more on the Medicaid side than the Food Stamp side. Mr. Rhodes stated we have been delayed by Civil Service on hiring more employees and we still intend to hire more employees.

Tyniquah Mullen stated she was one of the people who were in direct contact. Ms. Mullen stated she was informed by the administrator that the reason they are not informed is due to employees possibly panicking. Ms. Mullen asked how one tells someone who has a person at home with underlying conditions that they do not want to create a panic. Ms. Mullen stated the panic is worst when you tell the employee after the 14 days are up. Ms. Mullen also stated she told an administrator about the executive order from October 2020. Ms. Mullen stated when she mentioned this order, she was told the Agency did not have to adopt it which is false because it reads for public and private workers and business. Ms. Mullen stated that the Agency makes it feasible to work from home for the benefit of the Agency but not for the benefit of the employees to protect their health. Ms. Mullen stated if people were comfortable coming to work, you would get more production, and that she believes that the Agency is under the impression that it does not need to adopt certain things with regard to cleaning, ADA accommodations, and making the employees aware and protecting them. Ms. Mullen stated we must protect ourselves, and that the Agency's due diligence is to look into this executive order and take it into consideration. Ms. Mullen ended with stating that the Agency needs to realize that it does not have a choice but to adopt this executive order as it is for the protection, health, and safety of all employees

Mr. Rhodes responded that Ms. Mullen can be assured that the Agency follows all rules and regulations as required.

OPEN SESSION

Allegra Reed stated some of the people in her department have gotten side effects from the COVID vaccine and she would like to know if we have to use personal time, or does it count as COVID time. Ms. Hentisz suggested employees contact personnel since some of these questions come down to specifics on each individual case and as a courtesy the Agency is providing employees time off to get the vaccines. Ms. Hentisz stated if there are any concerns beyond getting the vaccines the employee should speak to the Personnel Department.

Dannielle Bonner stated she has an issue working in the Case Bank Department because she cannot be 6 feet away from coworkers. Ms. Bonner stated they are handing coworkers cases by hand with no glass protection between the coworkers. She also stated that coworkers come up to each other's desks as they eat lunch. Ms. Bonner would like to know if there is anything that can be done because we also have employees who work from home coming up from the first floor asking them for additional information on cases to include mail for the cases. Ms. Bonner stated they are always exposed to everyone in the building. Ms. Hentisz stated that plexiglass was put in when employees hand out cases. Ms. Hentisz stated she will go up with Kyra Wallace, Administrator and look at Case Bank Department to address the issue.

Cerina Muse stated that she has a strong concern regarding the numbers of employees who are on the first floor. She would like to know when it will be professionally deep cleaned and not by the people from Pritchard because, she said, they have not provided proper cleaning standards. Ms. Muse stated that employees interact with each other daily, and that her anxiety level was high over the weekend when she received a call saying she might have had recent contact. Ms. Muse asked what additional measures can employee take to ensure that there isn't a large outbreak? Ms. Hentisz stated the professional vendor that the Agency uses to clean the building is Pritchard and several times last week the Interview Department was cleaned as positives cases were confirmed. Ms. Hentisz stated they walked through with a misting solution that has the cleaner which is CDC and Health Department approved. Ms. Hentisz stated that on Saturdays Pritchard sprays every surface in the entire building. Ms. Hentisz stated as an extra precaution certain area in the interview department were cleaned again this week. Mr. Rhodes stated when one person is infected the Agency's goal is to react and make sure it does not spread by isolating. Mr. Rhodes stated we ask for separation and mask-wearing and that the Agency provides additional cleaning as the need arises, adding his assurance that it is the Agency's intent to make sure that we work closely with the Health Department to isolate any cases we become aware of and make those who may have had contact to make them aware and give them the opportunity to self-quarantine and make sure they get tested.

Simone Moore stated that administrators have been threatening to put workers in 5 days a week due to putting notes in CRM so late at night. Ms. Moore also suggested closing for a day to do a deep cleaning because she passes some areas in the Agency and floors are not being mopped or vacuumed and she see some tissues laying around. Mr. Rhodes stated he recommends notifying supervisors and administrators if employees see something not being cleaned so it may be addressed. Ms. Hentisz stated she will speak to administrators regarding employees putting notes in late at night when working from home.

OPEN SESSION

Audrey Watkins-Kizee via chat asked if the Agency is not concerned with the number of employees, we have out now with COVID and what is the agency doing about it. Mr. Rhodes stated he is sitting in the meeting being completely open. He said that the Agency and he are trying to address everything with the utmost concern and that we are trying to make sure everyone is safe at the agency. Mr. Rhodes stated we will follow up with the health department regarding contact tracing to make sure everything is being done correctly.

Lisa Zeon stated that, in her opinion, since the pandemic started the communication has been horrible. Ms. Zeon stated she finds out more information outside the Agency than inside it, and that administrators have meetings and come back to employees with bits and pieces and nothing makes sense. Ms. Zeon stated there are a lot of employees nervous about coming into work because they do not know if things are being cleaned, and that there is a whole bunch of chaos and no communication in this Agency. Ms. Zeon stated this does not make her confident about the Agency and she asked how we can rectify the communication so everyone can be on board with what's happening with this pandemic. Mr. Rhodes stated he cannot speak for the director, but that as far as COVID positives there is not much we can say because of HIPPA requirements. Mr. Rhodes stated he works with people who have been out and had no idea they had COVID.

Elizabeth Black stated she is currently in quarantine at this time due to being a contact of a contact and she was now informed she was in close contact with someone who tested positive. Ms. Black stated she was in contact from working at the navigation desk on Friday and there is not the opportunity to have social distance from the person you are working next to at the navigation desk. Ms. Black stated she would like to know if that area can be revisited to assure the staff that they can remain safe during this pandemic. Ms. Hentisz stated they will look into that area again to make sure it is safe for employees.

Cynthia Montanez stated that the ventilation system is horrible in the agency. She has left her phone on her desk and an hour later it was full of dust. Ms. Montanez stated that keeping the employees safe from COVID goes beyond cleaning, and that the ventilation system is also very important. Ms. Montanez stated restaurants and schools are required to upgrade their system according to the COVID standards. Ms. Montanez asked if our ventilation system been tested for COVID standards. Mr. Rhodes stated that the Agency uses the highest-grade air filtering system which are medical grade and that although they are supposed to be switched every 6 months, the Agency switches them every 3 months.

Shannon Davis stated she has a couple concerns. She tested positive for COVID in January and that because the doctors notes did not say COVID positive she was told she had to use her own time. Ms. Davis also had a concern about the glass divider put up on the third floor which, she said, has a gap at the bottom and is not protecting employees. Ms. Davis stated the Agency should be shut down and cleaned by professionals; not by the cleaning company that we have. Ms. Davis stated no one wants to work 5 days a week with bad ventilation and the area not being cleaned properly. She added that the employees had gotten emails on Fridays about Saturday cleanings but that they have not been received for weeks. Mr. Rhodes replied that he will address this with the director.

OPEN SESSION

Latonya Sandy stated she is a specialist who works Fridays, and the attorney came around and made statements to her that everyone that was out she would be touching their work after they completed it on Fridays since she does expedited cases. Ms. Sandy stated that when she said something about the statement, he said that is not a transmission and she doesn't have to worry. Ms. Sandy added that employees use the same printer on the first floor, and that having 10 confirmed cases she does not know what is considered an outbreak. Ms. Sandy stated the attorney replied that that was not considered an outbreak and that the transmission on the printers and folders is not a concern. Ms. Sandy stated that she asked the attorney if this is not a concern then why the folders are sitting in a room for 24 hours before they can be touched when workers bring them from home. Ms. Sandy stated that the reason why she feels that the Agency does not care is because we are not getting the best answers from the Department of Health, and that we should not be touching certain things for a certain amount of time. Ms. Sandy stated that the attorney saying that "you are ok, you will not catch it from the folders" is, to her, like a dismissal and therefore employees get bothered. Ms. Sandy stated that we want to be at work and do the job, but the place is not being cleaned she has not had the trash taken out half of the time.

Mr. Rhodes would like to thank everyone for voicing their concerns to the board. Mr. Rhodes stated we will be reviewing and addressing these matters.

Seeing that there was no one additional, Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to close the Public Participation portion of the Open Session. Ms. Betteridge moved to close the Public Portion of the Open Session. Ms. DeVera seconded the motion and there being no discussion on the motion, a vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously adopted.

The Open Session of the meeting continued.

OPEN SESSION

UPDATE STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIESChristine Hentisz, Director

Ms. Hentisz stated that all Board members would find a synopsis of informational transmittals, procedural bulletins, general assistance procedural bulletins and Division of Family Development instructions in their packet. If there were any questions on any of the material, Ms. Hentisz stated that she or her staff would be happy to answer.

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to approve the Director's Update on the State and Federal Policies.

Ms. Betteridge moved to approve. Ms. Morman seconded the motion and there being no discussion on the motion, a vote was taken and the motion to approve the Update was unanimously adopted.

OPEN SESSION

Resolution 211-2021 – Authorizing an Extension of Grace Period for Flexible Spending Arrangements (FSA) for Years Ending 2020 and 2021 Edward Hill, Esquire

Mr. Hill presented Resolution 211-2021. The Camden County Board of Social Services shall exercise the amendment to the Section 125 Flexible Spending Arrangements to extend the grace periods for years 2020 and 2021 from two and a half (2 ½) months to twelve (12) months.

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to adopt Resolution 211-2021.

Ms. Betteridge moved to adopt. Ms. Devera seconded the motion and there being no other discussion on the motion a vote was taken and the Resolution was unanimously adopted.

Resolution 212-2021 – Ratifying an Award of Contract, Pursuant To Solicitation of Quotations, by and Between Camden County Board of Social Services and Hart Halsey, Inc. D/B/A Extra Duty Solutions..... Edward Hill, Esquire

Mr. Hill presented Resolution 212-2021. Since the Camden County Board of Social Services is in need of police officer services the proper Board Officials be and are hereby authorized to execute all documents necessary to affect an agreement with Hart Halsey, Inc., D/B/A Extra Duty Solutions 1 Waterview Drive, Suite 101, Shelton, CT 06484, for a total cost not to exceed one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars and zero cents (\$165,000.00).

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to adopt Resolution 212-2021.

Ms. Betteridge moved to adopt. Ms. Devera seconded the motion and there being no other discussion on the motion a vote was taken and the Resolution was unanimously adopted.

Resolution 213-2021 – Authorizing an Emergency Award of Contract, For Deep Cleaning Services Edward Hill, Esquire

Mr. Hill presented Resolution 213-2021 which authorizes and ratifies an award of contract to Pritchard Industries, Inc. for deep cleaning services from March 6, 2021 to December 31, 2021, at a cost not to exceed one hundred and forty-one thousand nine hundred dollars and zero cents (\$141,900.00).

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to adopt Resolution 213-2021.

Ms. Betteridge moved to approve. Ms. Morman seconded the motion and there being no other discussion on the motion a vote was taken and the Resolution was unanimously adopted.

Resolution 214-2021 – Authorizing the Memorandum of Understanding with the State of New Jersey Department of Human Services Regarding the Administration of DMAHS Programs Including the New Jersey Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Programs Edward Hill, Esquire

Mr. Hill presented Resolution 214-2021 which authorizes entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the State of New Jersey Department of Human Services regarding the administration of DMAHS programs including the New Jersey Medicaid and children’s health insurance programs.

Ms. Betteridge moved to adopt. Ms. Morman seconded the motion and there being no other discussion on the motion a vote was taken and the Resolution was unanimously adopted.

OPEN SESSION

DIRECTOR’S REPORT.....Christine Hentisz, Director

Ms. Hentisz stated that the Division of Family Development and Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services have changed how they meet with the County Welfare Agencies since the pandemic started. Ms. Hentisz stated that we have been meeting via conference calls every other week and that both entities have looked into changing how they do their meetings to ensure at least once a month they are speaking directly to the Directors at each agency.

Ms. Hentisz stated that as far as the Pandemic EBT program the State is working on how it will look for 2021.

Ms. Hentisz reported that, if the board members recall that the State was giving additional benefits to children who were receiving free or reduced lunch in school and that at the Federal Level it has been slightly changed on who is eligible in 2021 and that the State is still working on how this will be done.

Ms. Hentisz stated another thing that has changed on the Federal level which the State is looking through is the expungement of benefits. Ms. Hentisz stated expungement of benefits means if a recipient has not used SNAP benefits the state removes the individual from the system and then the client can get them back after contacting the Agency. Ms. Hentisz stated that previously, in the old regulations, the expungement was done at six months and it has changed on the Federal level to nine months which is now the length of time the client has to use SNAP benefits before expungement.

Ms. Hentisz stated she would like to thank the Board for approving the resolution on the Memorandum of Understanding. Ms. Hentisz stated that we continue to work on the overdue backlog and the staff are making a tremendous effort. Ms. Hentisz stated in the weekly stats we received from the State today the overdue pending numbers dropped by over 50 applications in one week and that this has been a big improvement.

Ms. Hentisz stated that our new lobby opened about two weeks ago. Ms. Hentisz stated workers are no longer interviewing at their desks and that prepared full interview booths have been prepared. Ms. Hentisz stated that things have changed so that clients are only in the lobby and they are no longer going down to the basement or other parts of the building in order to provide safety for our employees.

Lastly, Ms. Hentisz stated that the County has offered to assist the Agency in ensuring all staff who would like a vaccine are able to receive the vaccine. Ms. Hentisz stated that starting this week we have been able to send names to the County and have gotten staff vaccinated and that the Agency appreciates the partnership in allowing our staff access to receive the vaccines.

Mr. Rhodes thanked Ms. Hentisz for her Director’s Report and asked if there were any questions or comments.

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to approve the Director’s Report.

Ms. Betteridge moved to approve. Ms. Morman seconded the motion and there being no discussion on the motion, a vote was taken and the motion approving the Report was unanimously accepted.

OPEN SESSION

FISCAL REPORT..... Paulette Konopka, Fiscal Officer

Ms. Konopka stated that each Board member had received copies of the Fiscal Report in their packet for the month of February 2021.

Ms. Konopka stated that if anyone had any questions, she would be happy to address them.

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to accept the Fiscal Report for February 2021 as presented in the packet.

Ms. Betteridge moved to accept. Ms. DeVera seconded the motion and there being no discussion on the motion, a vote was taken and the Report was unanimously accepted.

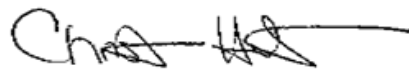
OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Rhodes stated we are deeply saddened by the loss of our fellow board member Dr. Leonard Krivy. Dr Krivy was a member of the Board of Social Services for a very long time and was an advocate for the clients we serve. Mr. Rhodes added that Dr. Krivy was always questioning and making us better at what we do. He said that Dr. Krivy hosted a video show for years and coached thousands of high school students on how to apply for colleges. Mr. Rhodes ended by saying Dr. Krivy was a true gentleman and a true friend who will always be missed.

Mr. Rhodes requested a motion to close the Open Session of the meeting and move to the Closed Executive Session to discuss personnel and legal matters. Ms. Betteridge moved to discuss such matters in closed session. Ms. Devera seconded the motion, and there being no discussion on the motion a vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.



Clerk