

NCACDSS

ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

March 10,2021

Jan began the meeting welcoming everyone and reminded everyone that they should have received the agenda sent to them by Brenda. Jan inquired if anyone had any questions or wanted to make corrections to the minutes from the January and February meetings. There were no comments, minutes were good as they are written.

There are several of our stakeholders with us who will talk about their legislative priorities and how they align with Association.

Jan introduced Kevin Leonard, the Executive Director of the North County Association of County Commissioners. Kevin discussed the goals/challenges they have and discussed their virtual conference that the association participated.

The number one legislative goal was broadband, HS goals in terms of mental health was number three. Other issues were the foster care issues which are critically important to the Association and they understand this and have heard from Sharnese about this.

Another big issue is the transition to managed care and how it will impact counties. They are working with the Department and establishing conversations with the heads of the PHP's. They are already thinking about what the implications of what the tailored plan transition and how it will impact on counties. A final issue is opioid abuse, it's another big topic that will come up later and in the next 6-12 months, they will be working the treatment of opioid use.

Kevin gave heartfelt thanks on behalf of the County Commissioners for the work that the DSS agencies do and introduced Paige Worsham, with the County Commissioners Association.

Paige:

There was a huge focus on DHHS issues before the legislation session started. In addition to the more than 70 goals the membership voted on, there were five priority goals, which are:

1. Broadband Internet
2. Public Schools funding
3. Sales & Property tax
4. Mental Health
5. Behavioral health

The goals are categorized as social services type goals, public health and behavioral health.

1. Support legislation and state resources for social services reform efforts as identified by the Social Services Work Group (SSWG). Increase state funding for social service programs, continue the Association to mandate regionalization, including revisions to the annual written agreement process.
2. Support continued state funding of Medicaid and support efforts to close the funding gap.
3. Support legislation for hold harmless provisions and staggered payment programs, to control and cap the liability. To either put a threshold or make it a more reasonable payback situation.
4. Seek additional funding and preserve block grant allocations for a variety of items including high quality child care, education, child welfare, APS, guardianship, women and children health services. As well as block grant and other federal block grants that have been diluted.
5. Support adequate funding and initiatives to local health departments and public health services.
6. Increase state funding and support legislation for behavioral health services and facilities.

7. Support legislation to improve the process to increase child support collection. They received good feedback from Cumberland County in terms of technical ways to increase the collections.
8. Ensure that rural transportation funding.

Sharnese:

Someone had asked if the goals had been sent out and was informed Brenda sent the link in the meeting notice and a hyper link on the website.

Sharnese said she spoke with Carla West regarding child support and how the pandemic impacted child support collections. In the beginning of February 2021, the state was 6 million ahead and this was greater than previous years collected.

Paige:

Discussed Family First, which has been on their radar for more than a year and welcome any information the counties have and how it may affect the budget.

Kare McLeod, Benchmark CEO

Focused on DSS issues. The first agenda item was increasing the foster care rate, this was passed in the budget two years ago. This resulted in an incremental increase over time to allow counties to have time to adjust. They have had conversations with leadership who is interested in putting it back in at the same rate previously, there will be no inflation rate.

They will ask for GAP funds to cover loss of IV-E dollars funds due to the FFPSA for three years. The attempt is to provide the services upfront to reduce the number of children in care. The ability to serve these children without the IV-E dollars will be very challenging.

They had a conversation with the Department who is in agreement and hope when the Governor's Budget comes out, there will be a request for funds. The Dept. would like to cover the cost of the counties share who will lose IV-E dollars 100% the first year and is available and 50% the second year.

There are concerns about the clinical program chosen, one in particular is the MFT for both mental and health services for kids. MFT is a very narrow service and can only be provided for children older than 12, with JJ involvement and will be expected to be the primary intervention service for in-home services.

They are supportive of the child fatality prevention system, passed in the budget two years ago. There was a directive to the Dept. to restructure the current system, which includes DSS, public health and coroner's office. There is no coordinated approach to, no one is head of the group and no shared IT system to synchronize the data. The Dept. has done a lot of planning on this and there is draft legislation to streamline a lot of the work. There is a shared national IT system that we do not have to pay for, 36 states are already using it. This is a federal program, training will be free and data can be compared.

There is a focus on safe gun storage; the number of guns has increased and there are a lot of guns in homes that are loaded and not locked. There is concern about children having access to guns, suicide amongst children is increasing and they think it's COVID related. There are concerns about school reopening and possible school shootings. They are not saying people should not own guns, but we need to discuss gun safety.

They are not leading any bills on broadband and telehealth, but will support the bills. They will continue to watch this.

They are supporting the bill which was a result of the Child Welfare Transformation Council, that supports the regional oversight positions. Support an increase rate in direct support workers, this crosses IDD and aging workers. On average they are paid about \$12.00 an hour and agencies can't

complete with Walmart, Targets, etc.. It's difficult to staff residential facilities, especially due to COVID, the high turnover rate and this is having a direct impact on the quality of care.

HB 918- criminalized women with children born positive, giving foster parents the same rights as the natural parents. There was a huge amount of backlash of this bill, they are confident the bill will come back. We have a group working with a couple of legislators to find a way to get permeancy for these children, without the language in the bill. The bill has not been introduced yet.

They are working on a bill, because of concerns of not having access to specialty services and residential care in NC and sending children out of state. The reason for this is licensure, pay and not having qualified staff. She was approached by a legislator who is getting together a committee with county DSS representatives including DSS Directors, Karen Harrington and Jennie Kristiansen, and Paige Rosemond from Wake County looking at this.

Senator Edwards introduced a bill regarding accessing the child's entire file and we have a lot of groups including, the School of Government and Directors to determine how they can receive information without providing the entire file.

We want a combination of services for the family and engage in a plan that focuses on the entire family. We need treatment modalities that can treat the entire family and completement each other to address families.

Thanks for your willingness to do an open letter with us regrading the the foster care plan that came out which needed improvement.

Jan:

Asked if there were questions for Karen, no questions asked. Jan said she was glad to see that Family's First is on everyone's radar.

Kevin:

Karen we would love your support on the county broad band bill which is our main goal.

They are focusing on the system of food delivery, public transportation of the food and cold storage. County Commissioners Assoc., President Smith identified this last summer on what he wanted to focus on.

Question was raised was how are county funds utilized for this type of for transportation and do we have to access cold storage? There is no storage for farmers and they are getting rid of food and it's going to waste. Farmers don't have an access to the market and this was a main issue due to COVID.

Brenda:

The task to increase broad band access is great. Food stamp recipients are able to purchase food online, but if they don't have broad band they can't order or have food delivered. This is especially an issue in rural counties.

Sharnese:

A bill tracker was sent on 3-5-21 and we are assigning the food trackers to various committees. The bill tracker will be updated and asked everyone to logon. She is working with the Cansler Group and last week sent everyone a week at glance. Approximately 90% of Directors said the really liked it. The goal is not to stockpile your emails, feel free to delete information sent.

Jan:

The Advocacy calls beginning Monday at 12:00, and will send it out and everyone is welcome to join the calls. Brenda sent the agenda and the final version of the social service's legislative priorities for

this year. They are the consortium priorities and we filled in some of the numbers, if you have a concern reach out in the chat box.

Sharnese:

Worked with the five Directors on the foster care plan letter and asked them to work on Medicaid payback, errors and the eligibility language and the number of audits and how to streamline this. They are also working on adult APS & guardianship reviewing other states and what they found is is very old.

Betsy Wells:

President of the DSS Board Members Association thanked everyone for the hard work performed across state and they are happy to partner with the association. The next meeting will be on March 19, 2021 form 10-2 at the cutting Board in Burlington, NC.

Next month- Justice Center to talk about legislative agenda if you any another other topic please email one of the Advocacy Committee members.

Sharnese:

John Eller asked if there was a way to know what bills are moved or not likely to get movement. Sharnese said they are fine tuning the bill tracker and we will be able to see them as they move.

Jan adjourned the meeting, and others agreed to this via writing in the chat box.

Prepared by Christine Dowdell, Advocacy Committee/Chowan County DSS