

Baltimore County Department of Social Services Board Minutes

The meeting of the Advisory Board of the Baltimore County Department of Social Services (DSS) was held November 18, 2019 at 4:00 p.m. in the Boardroom of the Baltimore County Department of Health and Human Services.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Gregg Powell; Chair, Mindie Flamholz and Dr. Jasmine Morse. Dr. Stefanie Bronson, Dr. Donald Gabriel and Lisa Simon Jablon attended via phone.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sheri Lumsden and Dr. Rosalyn Wiley.

OTHERS PRESENT: Dr. Gregory Branch, Director; Deborah Lank, Supervisor of Adoptions Unit; Mark Millsbaugh, Deputy Director; and Kathy Wynn, Executive Secretary to the Director.

I. Reading and Approval of the Minutes

Motion: To approve the minutes of October 21, 2019

Motion by: Ms. Flamholz

Second by: Dr. Gabriel

Decision: Unanimous Approval

II. Director's Report

Office of Housing

Ms. Parham participated in the introduction of the HOME Act legislation with the County Executive in early October. The legislation passed the Baltimore County Council and was signed by the County Executive on November 12. The Office of Housing will begin work to educate landlords as to how the program works; reiterating that the law does not force a landlord to take a voucher. Landlords do have to consider a voucher participant, allow them to apply and be screened on the same criteria as someone who does not have a voucher. Ms. Parham was a guest on a YouTube podcast with Sachs Realty to talk about the new legislation and housing voucher process.

Mr. Millsbaugh stated that this bill essentially is a civil rights policy that prohibits discrimination on source of income. It will increase where we can facilitate people living, it will not increase the voucher number. The main criticism of some of the landlords was being forced to participate in a government program.

Ms. Jablon mentioned landlord complaints that it takes too long to be paid or inspected. The Office of Housing looked at this process. For a tenant it can take up to 70 days to go through the entire process; from day of issue of the voucher until the time they inform us they have found a unit (an estimated 30 to 60 days).

Once we have that information it takes an average of 22 days to get a person in a unit, which is not above the industry standard. Typically, the landlord has not given us what they need for payment. More often than not, these issues are due to the landlord.

Traditional housing choice vouchers have been capped. Ms. Parham has applied for a number of other voucher programs. VA Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers have more than doubled. Additional Mainstream (MAIN) vouchers have been awarded. The Office of Housing's total portfolio has grown even though traditional "Section 8" vouchers awarded have been reduced. Out of state vouchers have to follow the guidelines of Baltimore County's program, not the state where they came from. Six million dollars goes to landlords every month in Baltimore County. Ms. Parham is hoping to issue vouchers to new program participants from the waiting list for the first time in four years beginning in January. Up to 100 vouchers may be awarded.

The Office of Housing is working through the waitlist which has been closed. Once done, Ms. Parham will come back to the Board regarding policies on how that list can be structured, priorities and what is important to the community. The Board thanked Ms. Parham for her efforts regarding this legislation.

As you know, the County is under a Voluntary Compliance Agreement working with the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The main piece of the Voluntary Compliance Agreement (VCA) for our Office of Housing is the Mobility Program, encouraging voucher holders to move to areas where there is less concentration of poverty. Other major parts of the VCA impact the Department of Planning and the need to create more affordable housing units in areas of opportunity. The mediator for the VCA is the Fair Housing Office of HUD. One of their main items of concern was that Baltimore County did not seem to have a single point of authority. In Baltimore County, the Office of Housing is overseen by Ms. Parham and the Office of Planning is responsible for the development of affordable housing. In addition, the Department of Permits, Approvals and Inspections (PAI) performs inspections for all housing units where the tenant is a voucher holder. The County Administrator's office was notified of HUD's concerns by Dr. Branch and since March there have been regular meetings with department heads to discuss concerns raised by HUD. The County Administrator is the lead person in the County Executive's office and asked that Ms. Parham be the communications/single point of contact with HUD. Strategies and action plans have been developed on how we will ameliorate HUD concerns; Ms. Parham is managing that document. As part of this process, we have been asked to look at the structure to determine efficiencies.

Ms. Parham is a candidate for the Vice-President of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment. If elected, it will provide an opportunity to show that Baltimore County has a very efficient program and continues to try to improve; we are an organization that is worth taking note.

Mr. Powell questioned if there were any plans for the Home Act Legislation to move to the State level. Ms. Parham responded that since the last time it was introduced in 2017, three other jurisdictions have come on board. It may not happen in the next legislative session but has more traction due to additional jurisdiction participation. It goes back to administering the program effectively; working to develop regional guidelines, streamlining to make the program as similar as possible within the counties in the State.

National Adoption Day

Ms. Lank was invited to speak to the Board regarding National Adoption Day which is the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving. Baltimore County holds an event every year in collaboration with the Bar Association at the Historic Courthouse to finalize adoptions. This year, ten adoptions will be finalized in addition to there being three private adoptions. Efforts made by staff for this event are to make it about the families and children. Judge Bailey presides over the proceedings with a reception held afterward with the families. Children from age two to 14 will be adopted, three of which are siblings. This is a nice event to celebrate the families as well as the hard work of staff. Annually, there are an estimated 40 adoptions in Baltimore County. The past two years we have had the highest number of adoptions totaling 67. You must be a foster parent in Baltimore County to adopt and must go through the legal process. We are looking for adoptive parents and have recently had a media campaign/television advertisement on how to become an adoptive parent. This Saturday's event will begin at 11:00 AM.

Maryland Association of Social Services Boards (MASSB) Conference:

Mr. Millspaugh reported that he and Dr. Gabriel attend the MASSB annual conference in October. Dr. Gabriel mentioned that the first item on the agenda was a good ice breaker; an exercise where all would go through a typical day of what a person goes through who is on public welfare and problems faced. The process was a nice exchange of conversation and lasted about an hour and a half.

There were some good presentations. Mr. Millspaugh's presentation, Modern Office Innovation, was on the new layout at Drumcastle implemented to create efficiencies in operation and also provide elements of safety. There was a lot of emphasis by other speakers regarding fundraising, 18 of the 23 counties have fundraising programs.

The last day of the conference included a number of business meetings. There was turnover in the Secretary and Treasurer positions. The MASSB has strong leadership and commitment from all levels. They are ready to help with supporting local departments with legislation and fundraising.

Fundraising was discussed at our last board meeting. Mr. Millspaugh spoke with Sue Dubin in the Office of Law regarding this topic. Ms. Dubin did not have concerns regarding the Board being involved with fundraising and using the MASSB for this purpose. Ms.

Dubin did state that the Board needs to be careful in that they cannot solicit from anyone who does business with the County.

If the Board had funds in an account and wanted to establish a process for granting the funds, one way to accomplish this is the Board could receive proposals for grants and make decisions on awarding those grants. This would be internal, for DSS programs items not already covered. If the Board chose to award to external entities, we would make certain they are not doing business with other counties avoiding any conflicts.

Mr. Powell inquired what if a company is part of a holding company. This would be a questions for Ms. Dubin. The foundation is 100% volunteer. Mr. Millspaugh can identify notices that can be sent regarding fundraising. Calvert County is raising funds for their Child Advocacy Center (CAC). Our CAC is government funded but there are always shortages, that would be another possibility. Staff would like a holiday sharing type of program where people could donate toys and other items but we don't have the administrative capacity to manage. Items for Camp Connect, having a send-off event for the kids or having more than one camp are possibilities.

Mr. Millspaugh will work on obtaining guidance for Mr. Powell to provide for individuals who wish to donate. Ms. Flamholz inquired if donations could be done online.

2019 Revere Bank Award for Innovative Programs

Mr. Millspaugh showed the Board his presentation for this award on Modern Office Integration. This presentation showcased how implementation of our new modern office has improved the customer experience. Baltimore County unfortunately did not receive the award this year. The program that won was a foster outreach program. The Secretary was very pleased with our presentation; believes it is a model for the State and has asked us to promote.

III. Old Business

N/A

IV. New Business

N/A

V. Remarks of the Chairperson

The Board does not meet in December. The next meeting will be January 13, the second Monday of the month due to the MLK holiday.

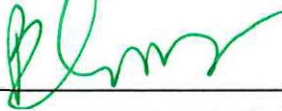
VI. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Motion by: Ms. Flamholz

Second by: Dr. Bronson

Decision: Unanimous Approval

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to be 'G. Wm. Branch', is written over a horizontal line.

Gregory Wm. Branch, M.D., MBA, CPE, FACP
Director

