

Minutes of Meeting

SOCIAL & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING Department of Social Services

May 20, 2013

Present: John Salka, Town of Brookfield
James Goldstein, Town of Lebanon
Alexander Stepanski, Town of Stockbridge
Michael Fitzgerald, Commissioner
Mark Scimone, County Administrator

The meeting minutes from April 22, 2013, had previously been distributed. On a motion by Alex and seconded by James, the meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

The caseload expenditures report was not available for distribution at the meeting. Mike will send it out once it is complete.

Mike reviewed that he had recently received a request from the Syracuse Regional Office (SRO) of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to review three childhood deaths that occurred from 2007 to 2010. The Buffalo News made FOIL requests for the fatality reports from OCFS and each county was responsible to issue a “best interest” determination to release the report or not. Mike explained that this news organization had earlier requested reports issued in 2011, and Madison County had one child death during that period. Based on the particular set of circumstances of that child’s death, Madison County DSS had recommended to OCFS to not release the report. Factors that would preclude the report from being released publicly include surviving siblings, siblings who were present during the fatality, siblings who might have had a “role” in the death of the sibling, or siblings who have had or are expected to have physical or psychological trauma as a result of the death of a sibling. Mike explained that for the child death report in 2011, the family met each of the criteria that would preclude that report from being released publicly. Yet, OCFS made the determination to release it anyway over the objections of Madison County. Mike wondered for the three child deaths from 2007 to 2010, should he go through the effort to do a best interest determination (each of the three deaths have surviving siblings) since it is apparent to him that OCFS does not take the recommendation of the local district into account? Since we cannot predict what others will do and we can only control our own actions, it was the recommendation of the committee for Mike to issue the “best interests” recommendations. If the reports are eventually released, Madison County can confidently report that we did everything possible to protect the surviving siblings from additional trauma.

Mike reported that the Summer Youth Employment Program, run by the Employment and Training office, is getting \$113,260 – an increase of \$65 from the previous year.

Mike discussed the changing landscape of Medicaid administration. He had earlier reported that by engaging with the Enrollment Center this year, he thought Madison

County could start to look at leaving positions vacant through attrition. Thus far in 2013, DSS has had three employees leave Social Welfare Examiner positions and DSS has not sought to refill any of them. However, at a meeting last week, and confirmed in a letter, the Affordable Care Act responsibilities that the State Health Department had assured counties would no longer remain at the counties will, in fact, continue to be a local DSS responsibility for much of 2014. Mike is concerned that any “planned” ability to get out of Medicaid has been severely hampered. He believes that any further reductions in staff would result in delays for residents. Fortunately, the good news is that because the state is retracting from earlier promises of providing assistance for the workload, they are keeping promises of not cutting funding. The concern from Mike’s perspective is that DSS will have to retain (or even hire) staff and then in 2015, start cutting. Mike will keep the committee updated.

Finally, Mike addressed the recent concerns regarding non-emergency Medicaid transportation management. He reviewed that the county’s contract with Birnie Bus included not only the public transit routes, but also the call center operation that served to coordinate and manage the 1500 rides per month necessary for Medicaid recipients. When the county was considering cutting the county allocation to Birnie, one of the deciding factors to support that cut was the State Health Department’s intent to take over the transportation management function and have that contracted out to a vendor. That contracting process began last fall with the assurance that the state’s vendor would be in place long before the county’s contract with Birnie expired (May 31, 2013). As could have been predicted, the contract is not finalized and the expected date has moved several times with the most recent communication indicating a “fall 2013” start date. Effective June 1, there is no Medicaid transportation coordination or management. Mike has clearly told State DOH staff that it would not fall on the shoulders of DSS to support a call center. As of last week, the State Health Department’s plan to address the non-emergency transportation for Madison County Medicaid-eligible recipients is for the clients’ medical providers to complete the requests for transportation, fax them to Albany, receive the “authorization” numbers, and call the taxi providers to arrange for the trips. To be clear, standing orders (those clients being transported daily or several times a week for recurring medical needs; i.e., dialysis, chemotherapy, methadone, etc.) are likely to not be impacted by the new process as they are “known” to the system. The problem, as Mike sees it, is the person coming into the Mental Health Department today in a crisis and an appointment is scheduled for the following week. “Who” at the Mental Health Department (or any other medical office seeing Medicaid patients) is going to fill out a form, fax it, get an authorization number, and then call a taxi company for a patient for next week? The administrative burden will be enormous and if this is expected for several months, we could see patients not getting treatment, physicians refusing to accept Medicaid, and transportation providers not willing to participate in the program. Mike also believes that families that are working with his Child Welfare staff will struggle and his casework staff will end up doing “shuttle services” at a tremendous cost and loss of productivity. Discussion ensued about what action to take to minimize the damage. Since Madison County supports the Health Department’s efforts and there is no advantage (or funding) to continue with Birnie Bus, the committee asked Mike to compose a resolution urging the state to “clear the bureaucratic hurdles” and get the contract finalized. The resolution

would be presented at the next board meeting and be sent to our state-elected representatives.

There being no further action necessary for DSS, the Mental Health Department began its presentation.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael A. Fitzgerald
Commissioner

Approved by Committee Chairman: _____ Date: _____