

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: JULY 27, 2007

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS TESSIER
O'CONNOR
SHEEHAN
BENTLEY
KENNY
F. THOMAS
MASON

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:
ROBERT PHELPS, COMMISSIONER
MICHAEL JABAUT, DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE
SERVICES
DOUG HERSCHLEB, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES
KATHY BAKER, FISCAL MANAGER
HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE & FISCAL
SERVICES
JOAN SADY, CLERK, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
SUPERVISORS CAIMANO
GERAGHTY
GIRARD
VANNESS
TODD LUNT, HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR
AMANDA ALLEN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Social Services Committee to order at 9:35 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Mason and carried unanimously to approve the minutes from the June 28, 2007 Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Robert Phelps, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Phelps noted that the two pending items listed would be covered within the agenda review. He advised that the first agenda item referred to a request for permission to fill a Grade B Case Supervisor position vacancy in CPS (Child Protective Services) due to a resignation. Mr. Phelps explained that this position would be filled by promotion from within his Department, resulting in the need to backfill both a Senior Caseworker and a Caseworker position. In addition, he reminded the Committee that his Department had experienced a 45% turnover in Caseworkers in less than two years, while the number of reports to the State Central Registry, requiring CPS investigation with respect to allegations of child abuse and neglect in Warren County, had increased by 43% over the past nine years. Mr. Phelps apprised that these reports were currently at their highest level and the Department was struggling with the increased workload demands. He stated that it was critical that the Department maintain adequate staffing and supervision; as such, he was requesting permission to backfill three Intake Clerk positions in the reception unit due to promotions. Mr. Phelps noted that all of the positions requested were funded within the existing budget and had been

reviewed and approved by the Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services.

Mr. O'Connor asked what factors had caused the increased turnover in CPS staff and Mr. Phelps replied that while most Caseworkers were case managers working with families with difficulties, the CPS division was a specialized profession which required staff to investigate and assess the risk to children, which in many cases resulted in their removal from the home. He explained that these positions were more stressful because there were many concerns and safety issues to be dealt with on a daily basis, leading to a higher turnover rate. In addition, Mr. Phelps noted, in the past members of the CPS staff had elected to transfer to the Probation Department for less stressful and more lucrative positions than those in the CPS Division. He said that one CPS Investigator, who was working on a temporary basis, had decided to leave his position for another at Central Registry in Albany, NY, while a recently hired CPS Investigator had decided not to take the position in favor of a teaching position.

Mr. Bentley asked what duties the Grade B Case Supervisor assumed and Mr. Phelps replied that this was the position under the Director and they were the program supervisor. He noted that the CPS, Preventive, Foster Care and Adult Protective programs each included a Grade B Supervisor position.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to approve all six personnel requests (*Grade B Case Supervisor, base salary \$36,641; Senior Caseworker, base salary \$33,970; Caseworker, \$33,012; Intake Clerk, base salary \$23,645; Intake Clerk, base salary \$23,645; and Intake Clerk, base salary \$23,645*) and refer same to the Personnel Committee. *Copies of all six requests are included with the minutes.*

Proceeding with the agenda review, Mr. Phelps advised that in the agenda he had included an overtime report reflecting payroll periods ending June 24, 2007 and July 8, 2007. He noted that this report reflected the majority of overtime was being accumulated in the CPS after-hours and Medicaid backlog areas. Mr. Phelps stated that the Medicaid overtime could be attributed to a lack of staff in that area and his recent decision to fill two vacant positions would hopefully reduce the amount of overtime accumulated. He added that all overtime costs associated with Medicaid were 100% reimbursable from New York State.

Mr. Phelps reminded the Committee that during a prior meeting they had requested that he review the CPS after-hours on call coverage and overtime incurred to determine if a better procedure could be implemented to reduce overtime costs. He advised that an analysis of costs had been included in the agenda for the Committee's review and it included the costs of stand-by allowances for staff on-call as well as overtime paid for staff having to respond to a case after working hours. Mr. Phelps explained that the final analysis reflected that the cost for stand-by coverage was \$16,923.64 while after-hours overtime costs accumulated were \$30,128.76 for a total of \$47,052.39 per year. He stated that this figure was far less than the costs of the salaries of the two additional staff members that would have to be hired to cover after-hours calls; Mr. Phelps added that \$99,000 had been estimated annually for these costs.

Mr. Phelps said that if an alternate scheduling method were implemented additional workloads would be accumulated by each CPS Investigator. He noted that State guidelines recommended twelve cases per CPS worker and currently each CPS worker was handling over twenty cases. Mr. Phelps added that there was no way the existing staff could reasonably absorb additional cases on top of those they were already handling. He stated that he did not know of another way to fiscally handle the workload in a better manner than they were now; however, he said, he was open to suggestions.

Mr. Caimano stated that from a moral standpoint, the figures reflected by the report for the procedures currently used were very reasonable as they equaled the salary of one additional person for a full year of coverage.

Mr. Payne asked what amount was paid to on-call staff and Mr. Phelps replied that the current rates were \$20 per night during the week and \$30 per night for weekends and holidays. Mr. O'Connor asked how the staff members were paid if they were called to respond to a report and Mr. Phelps advised that overtime was paid once a staff member was called. He added that they were paid a maximum of one hour overtime if substantial work was required from their home and a minimum of three hours of overtime per occurrence, as guaranteed by contract, if they were called to respond to a case.

Mr. Tessier thanked Mr. Phelps for the report, noting that it answered all of the questions the Committee had been asking and he stated that the current procedures used should remain in place.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Girard entered the meeting at 9:47 a.m.

Mr. Mason asked where the calls to the after-hours staff came from and Mr. Phelps replied that they could come from any source and quite often came from sources such as hospitals, teachers, neighbors or family. He said that calls were made to the Central Registry which was operated by mandated reporters who screened the reports to determine which needed to be investigated, at which point CPS was contacted. Once notified, a CPS Investigator was required to immediately investigate the report and make an assessment of risk to the children involved, Mr. Phelps apprised.

Mr. F. Thomas asked what the increase in reports in Warren County could be attributed to and Mr. Phelps replied that he felt it was due to a change in the conditions of the community and knowledge of the process and the need to report. In addition, he said, the profile of the community had also changed and they were seeing increased cases of drug trafficking and alcohol abuse relating to the cases reported. Mr. Phelps noted that the CPS division was understaffed and handling far more cases than the average indicated by State guidelines, causing additional stress on his staff. He stated that this was an item that would be discussed when developing the 2008 Budget request.

Resuming agenda review, Mr. Phelps advised that item number three pertained to a resolution request demanding that the State assume fiscal responsibility for the State mandated Connections. He explained that he had recently received a letter from the State advising that the local districts would have to assume the non-federal share of the Connections system, which was a subsystem of the Welfare Management System that addressed the needs in the services division. Mr. Phelps said that the local districts had been struggling with this system, as it had not been well developed or implemented by the State; he added that the State was having difficulty gaining federal approval for the system also. He said that the local districts were objecting to these costs as section 21(7)(a) of Social Services Law stated that the "full cost of expenditures by the State for the design, development and implementation of the Welfare Management System shall be borne by the State, utilizing any Federal funds made available for such purposes". Mr. Phelps said that because the Connections system was a component of the Welfare Management System it should be the fiscal responsibility of the State.

Mr. Phelps apprised that in the agenda he had included a draft resolution with respect to the matter. He added that he had also included copies of letters prepared by the New York Public Welfare Association, Inc. and he suggested that similar letters be forwarded to the Legislative representatives of Warren County requesting assistance in this matter.

Mr. Kenny agreed that a multi-prong approach should be taken with respect to the matter in that letters should be sent to the State Legislators and all information forwarded to Paul Dusek, County Attorney, to review the language of the information provided. He added if litigation were necessary he was sure other Counties would be glad to join Warren County in their efforts. Also, Mr. Kenny stated, they should check with NYSAC (New York State Association of Counties) to see if there was any pending litigation with respect to the matter through their group. He said that the matter should be referred to the Legislative Committee for further review.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Mason and carried unanimously to forward this matter to the Legislative Committee and the County Attorney for further review.

Messrs. Geraghty & VanNess entered the meeting at 9:53 a.m.

Mr. Phelps noted that he did not intend to budget funds for the Connection system, the costs of which had been estimated at \$1,100 per computer for 31 computers. Mr. Caimano stated that this point should be included in the letters forwarded to the State Legislators and in the resolution produced.

Concluding the agenda review, Mr. Phelps reminded the Committee that he had previously distributed copies of the Department of Social Services' Annual Report and he asked the Committee members if they had any questions with respect to it. Mr. Kenny stated that he had reviewed the report and he felt the Department was doing very well. Mr. O'Connor added that of all the reports received, the Department of Social Services seemed to go above and beyond in terms of the

information included in the reports and the results were fantastic. Mr. Phelps thanked his staff for their assistance in producing the reports, as well as maintaining the Department.

As there was no further business to come before the Social Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. Mason and seconded by Mr. Bentley, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 9:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amanda Allen, Legislative Office Specialist