

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 @ 5:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Board Chair Jim Miller called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

Present: Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Susan Nugent, Martin O'Donnell, Kim Withrow

Excused: Lee Armbruster, Andrew Lipian

Absent: Deborah Ortner

Also Present: Thomas Patrick and Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director

Board member Martin Heberling's Board term expired on December 31, 2025. The Board welcomed new Board member Susan Nugent. A swearing in ceremony will be scheduled with Judge Walther, based on his availability. Susan Nugent has requested to abstain until she is sworn in.

Board member Thomas Patrick's Board term expired on January 9, 2026. He is in attendance for tonight's meeting but will abstain from voting until he is reappointed by the Lorain County Commissioners.

B. Review Agenda

Board Chair Jim Miller asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Agenda submitted for the January 21, 2026, Board meeting. No additions or changes made.

C. Review and Approve Minutes

Board Chair Jim Miller asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Minutes submitted for the December 17, 2025, Board meeting. Hearing none, the minutes are approved as distributed.

II. Public Comment

Board Chair Jim Miller confirmed that there were no requests from the public to address the Board.

III. Old Business

A. Tabled Items

1. Policy 4.1 Pay Scale- Non-Bargaining

Tabled until union negotiations are completed.

2. APA Contract Approval

The Board was provided with a copy of the Agreement Between LCCS and the Lorain County Prosecutor's Office, renewed annually. The prosecutor's office provides legal services, writes complaints, motions and appeals and

represent LCCS in all court proceedings. The contract covers the salaries for four (4) Assistant Prosecuting Attorney’s (APA’s), three (3) Secretaries and half of the salary for a Supervisor. The civil prosecutor drafted a new contract this year, which condensed two contracts into one. The total contract cost for 2026 will be \$911,104.53. The contract amount last year was around \$650,000. The contract cost increased this year because the agency requested to receive the federal IV-E reimbursement amount of approximately \$250,000, previously reimbursed to the prosecutor’s office. Wage increases are also a factor in the increase to the contract amount.

MOTION: It was moved by Dan Gross, seconded by Tamara Newton to approve the Agreement Between LCCS and Lorain County Prosecutor’s Office and give the Executive Director the authority to finalize the contract. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Martin O’Donnell, Kim Withrow
Nays:	None- 0
Abstentions:	None- 0

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director’s Report

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

No new hires for the month of December.

Leaves for the month of December:

1. Denise Lindak, FBC AA 12/1/25
2. Melissa Elliot, DS Caseworker 12/16/25
3. Lindsey DeMarco, IL Caseworker 12/16/25

B. Policy 7.14 Client Grievance

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the Ombudsman Quarterly Report from October 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025, including the number of Grievances Filed, Public Complaints, Telephone Calls, Emails, Walk-ins, New Requests for Ombudsman Services, Pending Requests Resolved from Last Quarter, and New Requests Resolved within this Quarter. The most frequent complaints to the Ombudsman are regarding custody conflicts, questions about case plans and visitations.

Martin O’Donnell asked Kristen Fox-Berki to clarify the safety protocol for caseworkers when there is a concern regarding a safety risk. Kristen Fox-Berki confirmed that the caseworkers do have the authority to contact the local police department with jurisdiction should they need immediate assistance, and the agency does not require them to ask for permission from their supervisor prior to calling the

authorities. Caseworkers are trained to leave the home/scene immediately rather than to stay and attempt to deescalate the situation.

Roberto Davila asked for clarification on how the agency maintains balance between false reporting and verified reports. Situations with malicious reporting and intentionally calling with false information are rare; it is a crime to report maliciously. Referral Specialists ask detailed questions to determine whether to accept a report for investigation or screen it out. The Ombudsman's role is to maintain neutrality. Ombudsman Deborah Bailey shared that she would speak to each party separately and then bring them together to facilitate a solution if necessary, encouraging the individual with the complaint to cooperate with the agency and staff.

C. Policy 8.2 Strategic Plan Update

Tabled until the February Board meeting.

D. LCCS Connections Center

The only outstanding item is the county badges for staff building access. The County switch was installed, and our IT department is working with the County IT department to gather the information needed to complete the install. This is expected to be resolved soon. Therapy dog, Kyra visited the children yesterday at the Connections Center. Desk phones and cameras were installed, and the sign was ordered.

E. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

Rania Assily thanked Kristen Fox-Berki, Judith Padua and Kris Ross for meeting with her last week to discuss foster care recruitment. Judith Padua provided Ms. Assily with flyers with talking points to share with the Board and the LCCS brochure. There is a QR code on the back of the brochure to access information on how to become a foster parent. Rania Assily encouraged Board members to distribute the brochures & flyers, join and follow LCCS social media platforms and share with family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.; there's always more that can be done. The goal is to share information to recruit foster parents. Rania Assily invited the Board to reach out to her or Kristen Fox-Berki if they are interested in joining the subcommittee.

V. Fiscal Reports

A. Policy 6.1 Quarterly Financial Update

Kristen Fox-Berki and Director of Fiscal Affairs, Jessica Basinski presented, and the Board reviewed the Lorain County Children Services Revenue, Disbursements and Cash Fund Balance as of December 31, 2025.

Revenue:

The total Revenue for October – December 2025 is \$3,074,665.42.

- The main sources of Revenue were Foster Care Maintenance, IV-E Admin/Training & Other Federal, SCPA & Other State funding and KSI/KGAP.

Expenditures:

The total Expenditures for October – December 2025 is \$7,464,802.83.

- Office Supplies and Agency Equipment- the postage invoice include July and September as well as the annual planners/calendars provided to staff.
- Vehicle & Travel Training- Gas Mileage Reimbursement payments included invoices for four (4) months rather than three (3).
- Services to Clients and their Families
 - Purchased Board and Care ranged between \$550,000 to \$600,000 per month for the last three (3) months, which put us over \$5.2 million for the year.
 - KGAP was over budget.
 - Professional Services included costs for the agency website for 2026.
- Connections Center
 - Equipment- included camera installation expenses.
 - Contract Services- includes cleaning services.
 - Capital Improvements includes the final payment to Williams Brothers.
- Other- PCSAO and Child Welfare league of America

The Beginning Fund Balance for October – December 2025 is \$15,594,586.25 and the Ending Fund Balance is \$11,204,448.84.

Board member Martin O'Donnell noted the Staff Training line item is under budget and asked if we should evaluate the amount budgeted annually, or alternatively evaluate trainings provided to staff. This funding stream is used for sending staff to specialized trainings, often conferences with costs associated for registration, travel, daily food allowance, etc. Most staff training is provided by the State, either virtually or in person through the Akron training center. New hires and new supervisors are required to complete CORE training through the State.

Jessica Basinski shared that our carryover continues to decline each year by just over \$2.5 million due to placement costs. Something will need to be done. Board Chair Jim Miller shared that another levy will be necessary to supplement the levy funds we currently receive, either in the primary or general election in 2026. We were hopeful that we would receive additional funding from the State but that did not happen. Jessica Basinski will calculate the amount needed, currently approximated to be around \$3 million per year. Once this is determined, the Auditor's office would calculate the millage based on our need. We must continue to meet the needs of our community and our children and investigate allegations of abuse and neglect. Placement costs have increased drastically in Ohio, making it difficult to keep up. Further discussion will take place at the next Board meeting.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

1. Policy 1.2 Board Officers- *Board Secretary Nomination & Vote*

Board Chair Jim Miller opened the floor for nominations for Board Secretary, to serve the remainder of Martin Heberling's term, from January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026.

Nomination received by Dan Gross, seconded by Roberto Davila to elect Rania Assily to Board Secretary.

MOTION: It was moved by Martin O'Donnell, seconded by Tamara Newton to approve Rania Assily as Board Secretary for a one-year term, January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Martin O'Donnell, Kim Withrow
Nays:	None- 0

VII. Executive Session *(to discuss litigation, personnel matters and other matters required to be kept confidential by law)*

MOTION: It was moved by Tamara Newton, seconded by Kim Withrow to enter Executive Session to discuss litigation and personnel matters. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Martin O'Donnell, Kim Withrow
Nays:	None- 0
Abstentions:	None- 0

Kristen Fox-Berki and Kevin Shebesta from Clemans Nelson met with the Board for Executive Session.

VIII. Announcements

The March Board meeting will need to be rescheduled. Board Chair Jim Miller proposes rescheduling to Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Please notify Mr. Miller if there is a scheduling conflict.

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Tamara Newton to adjourn the Board meeting at 6:16 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Martin O'Donnell, Kim Withrow
Nays:	None- 0
Abstentions:	None- 0

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

Minutes Prepared by:
Kimberly Kassam, Administrative Supervisor

Approved by:
Rania Assily, Board Secretary