

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 @ 5:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Board Chair Jim Miller called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

Present: Lee Armbruster, Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick, Kim Withrow

Excused: Susan Nugent

Absent: Deborah Ortner

Also Present: Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director

B. Review Agenda

Board Chair Jim Miller asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Agenda submitted for the February 18, 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 January 21, 2026, Board meeting. Hearing none, the minutes are approved as distributed.

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Dan Gross to approve the January 21, 2026, Board Meeting Minutes. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

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

The Board is opting to adjust the pay scale for the non-bargaining employees, with a rate increase of 4.5% effective January 1, 2026.

MOTION: It was moved by Dan Gross, seconded by Kim Withrow to approve a 4.5% rate increase for non-bargaining staff, effective January 1, 2026. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

2. Policy 8.2 Strategic Plan

The Board reviewed the Strategic Plan 2024-2026 Update, Period 4: July 2025 – December 2025.

Progress by Strategic Goal

Goal 1: Safety

- Objective 1 and Target Measures- Reduce the recurrence of maltreatment from 8.2% to no more than 7% by December 2026.
 - Achievement: As of December 2025, the rate was reduced to 5.7%.
- Objective 2 and Target Measures- Reduce the number of children in congregate care from 26 to 12.
 - Our goal of decreasing the number of youths in congregate care to 17 by December 31, 2025, was not met. Currently there are 29 children placed in congregate care settings. LCCS staff realize this is an increase and work to continue to develop strategies to decrease the number of children/youths placed in congregate care settings. Kristen Fox-Berki mentioned that although the number increased, the total percentage decreased to 11.5%.

Goal 2: Permanence

- Objective 1 and Target Measures- Increase the percentage of children that exit agency involvement within 12 months of case opening from 65% to 80%.
 - LCCS increased the percentage of children exiting agency involvement from 65% to 68.2% during this period. The goal was 72% by December 31, 2025. This was an improvement from 2024.
 - There are challenges due to the court process, causing some delay in children exiting agency care.
- Objective 2 and Target Measures- Increase the number of caring, inclusive and qualified LCCS foster families by 5% per year for the next three years.
 - As of 12/3/25 there are 58 licensed foster homes. This includes 13 new licenses. LCCS received 21 foster care applications in 2025. The application process takes 3-4 months, which means

that some of the perspective foster parents may have applied in 2025, but would not be licensed until 2026.

- Kinship caregivers are also being licensed. In 2025, 44 new kinship foster parents were licensed.

Goal 3: Well-Being- Families and children have enhanced capacity to meet their physical, cognitive, and educational needs.

- Objective 1 and Target Measures- Increase the number of children in non-kinship foster care who remain in Lorain County or Adjoining Counties (Nov. 2023- 76%).
 - *This objective was merged with Reducing the Number of Children in Congregate Care and Increasing the Number of Qualified Foster Families as the work needed for this objective is similar.*
- Objective 2 and Target Measures- Increase the number of siblings placed with some or all of their siblings when placed in traditional foster care. (Nov. 2023- 81%).
 - As of December 2025, the number of siblings in traditional foster care placed with some or all of their siblings reached 86%.
- Objective 3 and Target Measures- Increase the number of fathers (or non-custodial parent) participating on case plans from 62% to 80%.
 - As of December 31, 2025, 74% of fathers are listed as case plan participants. We are now 1% over our target rate of 73%.

Foster Care Recruitment

The Board reviewed the handout titled Foster Care Recruitment Outcome Measures 2025. In 2025 LCCS focused on rural communities, veteran populations and school-based partners, with a goal of securing 25 foster care applications. These efforts resulted in 107 outreach events, 143 inquiries, 313 overview invitations and 142 attendees, leading to 21 foster care applications. Our focus will expand to include faith communities, empty nesters and mission driven volunteers. FBC managers and supervisors are working with non-profit organizations in our county to serve families. It is more difficult to place teens and children with special needs. After school supervision becomes a barrier. A group at LCCS has met with organizations throughout the county to talk about services they have to offer that serve these age ranges and provide various activities. This allows us to expand our support group and provide services to the older children. The focus is to keep children closer to parents, within their own community, neighborhood, city, school system, etc.

Rania Assily asked if the agency has a list of the nonprofit organizations. Kristen Fox-Berki offered to send a list to the Board. There are home schooling groups that we could potentially reach out to. If a child is in agency custody, they are required to attend public school, however, foster parents have the option to send a foster child to a private school at their own expense. The agency does not cover the cost.

3. 2026 Levy

The agency is partially funded through a property tax levy. Due to the rising number of children in care, the significant increase in placement costs and the continued decrease in the Ending Fund Balance, costs are unsustainable. For the month of November and December, the cost for Purchased Board and Care, for network foster homes, residential placements and group homes, was \$1.2 million. To sustain the annual budget, it is necessary to place a levy on the ballot in November 2026. Further discussion is forthcoming.

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hires for the month of January:

1. Markeisha Cooper, DS Caseworker 1/26/26
2. Tracey Marshall-Dove, DS Caseworker 1/26/26

Leaves for the month of January:

1. Angela Isom, DS Caseworker 1/13/26
2. Lisa Friend, DS Caseworker 1/30/26
3. Melissa Abrams, DS Administrative Assistant 1/30/26

B. Policy 4.5 Personnel Policy & Procedure Manual

The Employee Operational Policy and Personnel Manual is typically updated following changes to the union contract, which is currently pending negotiations. Once the manual is updated, the prosecutor's office will finalize and approve it.

C. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

Family Recruitment coordinator Judith Padua continuously provides the agency with recruitment efforts, attending various events in the community including schools, churches, networking events, etc. Although this is her primary role, other agency employees also attend the events and assist her with recruitment efforts. Rania Assily plans to meet with Judith Padua again within the next few weeks.

V. Fiscal Reports

None.

VI. New Business

None.

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 Roberto Davaila to enter Executive Session to discuss personnel matters. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

VIII. Announcements

The next Board meeting is rescheduled to Wednesday, March 11, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: It was moved by Dan Gross, seconded by Tamara Newton to adjourn the Board meeting at 5:49 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 11, 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