

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, May 20, 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, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Thomas Patrick

Excused: Lee Armbruster, Susan Nugent, Martin O'Donnell, Kim Withrow

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 May 20, 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 April 15, 2026, 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. 2026 Levy

Kristen Fox-Berki spoke at the April 24, 2026, Board of Commissioners meeting regarding our increase in placement costs and the need for an additional levy and asked the Commissioners to approve a Resolution to request to the Lorain County Auditor to provide a valuation for a .30 mill additional levy for the November 3, 2026 election. The Commissioners approved the Resolution. On May 4, 2026, we received the Certificate of Estimated Property Tax Revenue from the Auditor's office based on a .30 mill levy, stating that we would receive approximately \$3.6 million annually and the annual cost to the taxpayer would be \$11.00 for each \$100,000.00 of the county auditor's market value. Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with two budget projections based on the revenue that would be generated by a .30 mill additional levy and a .35 mill additional levy. The Board is not planning to vote today but Board Chair Jim Miller wanted to ensure that the Board members have the information to review before voting at the June 17, 2026, Board meeting. Once a decision is made, the Board will request the Lorain

County Commissioners to approve placing the additional levy on the November 3, 2026, ballot. We must have everything to the Board of Elections by early August.

Martin O'Donnell requested talking points at the April Board meeting to use as a guide for responding to questions from the community regarding the levy; Kristen Fox-Berki provided a handout with talking points at today's meeting. Rania Assily suggests a "praise report" that could be shared with the public to demonstrate the good work the agency is doing. Kristen Fox-Berki plans to share positives/agency accomplishments with the Board of Commissioners as part of her presentation. Roberto Davila inquired about the measures the agency has already taken to reduce the budget. Kristen Fox-Berki shared that the agency has worked hard over the last few years to reduce the budget by means that are within our control, such as evaluating the need to fill positions when staff members leave to reduce staffing, as well as finding ways to reduce spending and overtime. Placement costs, which have increased costs significantly, are not within the agency's control. The agency is mandated to find placements for children in our care. Placement costs have increased throughout the State. Types of placements from least to most restrictive include kinship homes, foster homes, group homes and residential centers. Thomas Patrick requested Kristen Fox-Berki provide the Board with data on the average cost per child for each type of placement. Chris Cabot reiterated that the Board should keep prevention in the forefront of the discussion.

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hires:

1. Lisa Friend, FBC Support Caseworker 4/6/26
2. Brian Work, DS Caseworker 4/6/26
3. Mary Jones, DS Caseworker 4/6/26

Leaves:

1. Virginia Bowen, OhioSTART Caseworker 4/14/26
2. Melody Miller, DS Caseworker 4/16/26
3. Tracey Marshall-Dove, DS Caseworker 4/21/26
4. Ericka Wilkerson, DS Administrative Assistant 4/30/26
5. Mary Lee Davis, FBC Kinship Caseworker 4/30/26

Roberto Davila inquired about the reasons that staff are leaving. Kristen Fox-Berki shared that employees leave for many reasons including relocation, unsuccessful completion of the probationary period, retirements and not liking the job. The HR department does conduct exit interviews. Kristen Fox-Berki shared the employees were asked to complete an Employee Satisfaction Survey. The results will be presented to the Board.

B. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

Proclamation

Kristen Fox-Berki shared the Proclamation, recognizing May as Foster Parent Month in Lorain County, Ohio, and shared that the agency had a recent opportunity to present at the Lorain County Commissioner's meeting. One of the long-time foster parents were present and recognized.

During the month of May, foster parents are highlighted across LCCS social media platforms weekly on Fridays to increase public outreach and share positive outcomes. There is an upcoming meeting with Tamara Newton, Rania Assily, Kristen Fox-Berki, Judith Padua and Emma Morris on May 27, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. to talk more about recruitment.

C. Policy 8.1 Annual Report

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the 2025 Annual Report. The Board reviewed the report:

- Types of Allegations- the highest number of allegations are related to neglect and physical abuse.
- The number of referrals increased by 2% from 2024 to 2025.
- Almost 75% of the children who had referrals that were screened in for an intake assessment/investigation live in Elyria and Lorain.
- The Connections Center highlights including the grand opening and beautification day.
- In 2024, 55% of children in care were placed with kin, increasing to 58% in 2025. The number of children in congregate care stayed about the same.
- The median time spent in foster care decreased, from 10.5 months in care in 2023 to 9.3 months in care in 2025.
- Community engagement highlights included the Princess Ball, therapy dog and holiday donations.
- Throughout the year, there were 107 foster care recruitment events across targeted populations as well as the broader communities, resulting in 13 newly licensed traditional foster homes.

The 2025 Annual Report was mailed to the recipients on the Community Action Network (CAN) mailing list which includes police chiefs, school personnel, non-profit organizations, community partners, mental health providers, etc. The Board stated the 2025 Annual Report was very well done.

V. Fiscal Reports

None.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

1. Collective Bargaining Agreement with UAW Local #2192

The Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), effective January 1, 2026 and through March 31, 2028, was approved by the Lorain County Commissioners on April 24, 2026, following the vote by union members to approve it.

2. Non-Bargaining Wages

The CBA effective January 1, 2026, includes wage increases for all bargaining staff:

- An increase of 4.5% retroactive to January 1, 2026.
- An increase of 5.5% beginning the first full pay period in April 2026.
- An increase of 2% beginning the first full pay period in April 2027.

At the February 18, 2026, Board meeting, the Board opted to adjust the pay scale for the non-bargaining employees, with a rate increase of 4.5% effective January 1, 2026. Now that the CBA is finalized, Kristen Fox-Berki is asking the Board to approve the same wage increase for bargaining and non-bargaining staff members.

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Andrew Lipian to approve a 5.5% wage increase for non-bargaining employees, retroactive to the pay period beginning on April 5, 2026. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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| Ayes: | Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Thomas Patrick |
| Nays: | None- 0 |
| Abstentions: | None- 0 |

3. LCCS Cleaning Services & Travel Management Contracts

The agency was required to complete the Request for Proposals (RFP) process before renewing the cleaning services and travel management contracts. That process has been completed, and both contracts will continue with our current vendors, based on the RFP scoring criteria.

MOTION: It was moved by Tamara Newton, seconded by Roberto Davila to approve the LCCS Cleaning Services and Travel Management contracts. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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| Ayes: | Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Thomas Patrick |
| Nays: | None- 0 |
| Abstentions: | None- 0 |

VII. Executive Session *(to discuss litigation, personnel matters and other matters required to be kept confidential by law)*
None.

VIII. Announcements

Andrew Lipian expressed condolences on the passing of County Administrator Jeff Armbruster, husband to Board Member Lee Armbruster. The Board discussed donating flowers; however, his obituary specified the family’s wishes for donations to the Esophageal Cancer Education Foundation, the American Cancer Society’s esophageal

cancer research fund, or Siedman Cancer Center in lieu of flowers. The Board members expressed their interest in providing a donation. Jessica Basinski, Director of Fiscal Affairs was asked to clarify the Board’s annual budget, which is \$1,000 annually.

MOTION: It was moved by Thomas Patrick, seconded by Dan Gross to donate \$500 from the Board’s annual budget to the Esophageal Cancer Education Foundation. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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| Ayes: | Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Thomas Patrick |
| Nays: | None- 0 |
| Abstentions: | None- 0 |

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Tamara Newton to adjourn the Board meeting at 5:41 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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| Ayes: | Rania Assily, Christopher Cabot, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Thomas Patrick |
| Nays: | None- 0 |
| Abstentions: | None- 0 |

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 17, 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