

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, July 16, 2025 @ 5:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Board Chair Jim Miller called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

Present: Lee Armbruster, Roberto Davila, Christina Doran, Martin Heberling, Jim Miller, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick, Kim Withrow

Excused: Rania Assily, Kenneth Glynn, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Tamara Newton, Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director

Also Present: Julie Haight, Director of Social Service Programs

B. Review Agenda

Board Chair Jim Miller asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Agenda submitted for the July 16, 2025, 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 June 18, 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.

B. Unresolved Action Items

1. Policy 5.6 Executive Director Contract

See Agenda Item III.B.2, Policy 5.12 Executive Director Performance.

2. Policy 5.12 Executive Director Performance

The current employment contract for Executive Director, Kristen Fox-Berki expires on November 10, 2025. Board Chair Jim Miller appointed three (3) members of the Board to review the employment contract and conduct a performance review. Board committee members include Roberto Davila, Rania Assily, and Andrew Lipian. Kristen Fox-Berki will provide the evaluation team with the necessary documents needed by the end of July to complete the evaluation.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. LCCS Staff Presentation- Independent Living

Presenting Staff Member:

Cathy Fairbanks, Independent Living (IL) Supervisor. Also presenting: two (2) Independent Living youth.

Presentation Summary:

Independent Living services are provided to children in LCCS custody, beginning at age 14 and continues through age 21. Initially, the youth will participate in an informal meeting with the direct services caseworker and their caregiver, and an IL assessment is completed. Based on their specific needs, an IL case plan is developed to begin working on life skills. At age 17, a transition meeting is held to determine the necessary services and supports to make them successful as they age out of care. They can continue with services through the IL department after they age out, through age 21. We currently have 45 children in the IL program and 14 youth that have aged out. Cathy Fairbanks asked each youth questions about their experiences.

- 1) Each youth described their first day in care, their experiences coming into care and what it was like to move into foster homes.
- 2) They described what they found helpful about the independent living program and their challenges.
- 3) They described their experiences with the Independent Living program and talked about the ways they felt they were supported during the program and during their transitions from agency custody to aging out of care, as well as things that could have been done to make them feel more supported.
 - Both found the program helpful with the transition to adulthood, and the peer supports were helpful with the adjustment. One youth indicated it would have been more helpful if they had felt more reassurance with the plan moving forward after aging out.
 - Cathy Fairbanks shared some of the services that are typically provided to youth, such as offering a transition home, aligning them with a job and connecting them to the car and apartment programs. There have been some barriers with landlords renting to 18 year olds. We will continue to look for ways to improve the program and support our youth.

The Board thanked both youth for sharing their experiences, congratulated them on their accomplishments and for speaking so candidly and eloquently during today's presentation.

B. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hires for the month of June:

1. Emma Morris, Public Relations & Community Events Coordinator, 6/16/25
2. Heather Thacker, DS Caseworker, 6/23/25

Leave for the month of June:

1. Carmen Toro-Wooten, Kinship Caseworker, 6/27/25

C. Policy 5.14 Annual Management Plan

There are three (3) initiatives identified for the next Management Plan:

1. Utilizing Data from the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Department to help improve services in the Direct Services (DS) and Family Based Care (FBC) departments.
2. Implement the new timekeeping system (Timecard Plus).
3. Connections Center Operations.

Further discussion is tabled until the August 20, 2025, Board meeting.

D. Policy 7.14 Client Grievance

Tabled until the August 20, 2025 Board meeting.

E. Policy 8.2 Strategic Plan Update

The Board was provided with a copy of the Strategic Plan 2024-2026 Update, Period 3: January 2025 – June 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 June 2025, the rate was reduced to 8%.
 - The CQI Manager is conducting a review of each child named in the maltreatment report to promote consistency in decision-making.
 - The CQI Coordinator has also developed a dispositional training for caseworkers to clarify the criteria for completing dispositions.
- Objective 2 and Target Measures- Reduce the number of children in congregate care from 26 to 12.
 - There are currently 25 children placed in congregate care, which is an increase since the last update.
 - Since January 2025 we have licensed 8 new foster homes and there are currently 10-12 potential foster homes that are in the licensing process.
 - There have been 45 outreach events held in the community, including schools.
 - We continue to work diligently to bring children that are placed out of county and out of state closer to home.

Goal 2: Permanence

- Objective 1 and Target Measures- Increase the percent of children that exit agency involvement within 12 months of case opening from 65% to 80%.
 - During this review period, there was an increase by 0.5%, to 69%.
- 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 June 9, 2025, there are 57 licensed foster homes. Based on the current trend, we are on track to meet the goal by the end of the year. We continue with our strategic recruitment plan to focus on three identified groups: rural/township areas, veterans and school employees. Family Recruitment Coordinator, Judith Padua continues to attend community events. Upcoming events include the Lorain County Fair and the Corn Festival in North Ridgeville. There is a

foster parent panel scheduled on September 10, 2025, at Lorain County Community College.

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 May 2025, the number of siblings in traditional foster care placed with some or all of their siblings reached 85%.
 - Columns will be added to differentiate between siblings placed in traditional foster homes vs. kinship licensed homes. A licensed kinship foster caregiver is a relative/interested third party (someone that is familiar with the child) that becomes licensed for the care of specific children and KGAP. A traditional licensed foster caregiver is usually a stranger to the child.
- Objective 3 and Target Measures- Increase the number of fathers (or non-custodial parent) participating on case plans from 62% to 80%.
 - This goal was exceeded; we reached 82 %. A liaison is identified.
 - A questionnaire was developed and is being sent to all incarcerated parents to measure their interest and capacity to participate in their child's case plan.
 - Agency liaison with the Fatherhood Initiative Group has been established and families are actively being referred for community support and connection.
 - Family Search & Engagement staff are engaging the non-custodial parent to encourage and support participation in case planning for their child.

F. LCCS Connections Center

An on-site visit was held on July 2, 2025, with Commissioner Gallagher, Jim Miller and Martin O'Donnell. Following this, Commissioner Gallagher reached out to Keep Lorain County Beautiful to collaborate with the County to provide the landscaping for the LCCS Connections Center. They are looking for volunteers to assist. Willoway Nurseries, Inc. is donating a lot of the plants and provided a landscaping design. The Lorain County Visitors Bureau is donating \$4,000 to purchase river rock. The landscaping is scheduled for Thursday, August 14, 2025.

The playground installation should begin within the next two weeks. The new roofing and leak repairs should be completed by the end of next week. The flooring and painting are done. WB Mason is scheduled to deliver furniture on Monday, July 28, 2025. At this time, we have not decided to move forward with repaving the parking lot; it does not need to be done immediately. Due to the expense, if a decision is made to repave the lot, it would require Board approval for additional

funding. The Lorain County Engineer found some blockage in the storm sewer, and plan to dig it up and replace a section of it. They will resolve the issue.

G. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

No update to provide at this time.

H. Data Reporting for LCCS Families

The Board requested additional data at the May 21, 2025 Board meeting. LCCS cannot obtain data regarding the number of single parent homes, income or marital category. However, the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) department provided a data report, Lorain County Children Services- Focused Demographics. Summary:

1. Geographics of Intakes Received
 - a. Concentration of Intakes- Elyria and Lorain account for the highest rates of intake assessments. These two cities alone represent nearly 60% of all intakes.
 - b. Socioeconomic Impact- strong correlation is evident between poverty and intake rates.
 - c. Racial Disparities- communities with higher percentages of black and Hispanic children have disproportionately high intake rates.
2. Race of Father Names on Intake/Ongoing Cases- there is an overrepresentation of black fathers. White fathers are majority but underrepresented.
3. Adult Risk Contributors- parenting practices are the most common risk factor, present in over half of cases (54%). Nearly two in five families are impacted by one or more: mental health, substance use, domestic violence.
 - a. Data retrieved from family assessments.
4. Child Race Statistics at various stages through duration of family involvement.
 - a. Black or African American: Disproportionality- despite being only 8.1% of the population, they are overrepresented in reports and foster care relative to their population size.
 - b. White: Disproportionality- underrepresented in reports and foster care compared to their population.
 - c. Hispanic: Disproportionality- slight overrepresentation in foster care relative to population.
5. Child Removals by City/Zip Code- Elyria and Lorain have the highest number of child removals compared to other cities in Lorain County and surrounding areas.
 - a. Note: child removals outside of Lorain County- LCCS may be involved with a family where there is a safety plan with the children staying with a caregiver out of the County. Additionally, if LCCS has filed in court and the family moves, LCCS often maintains jurisdiction.
6. Top Causes of Removal- primary reasons include:
 - a. Neglect- 51 cases (most common reason, 35% of all removals).
 - b. Physical abuse- 31 cases.
 - c. Drug abuse of parent/caretaker- 30 cases.

These three reasons along account for 112 of the 146 total removals (77%), highlighting that the majority of cases involve either harm to the child or parental substance abuse.

The Board can contact Kristen Fox-Berki to follow up with further questions.

V. Fiscal Reports

A. Policy 6.1 Quarterly Financial Update

Director of Fiscal Affairs, Jessica Basinski presented, and the Board reviewed the Lorain County Children Services Revenue, Disbursements and Cash Fund Balance as of June 30, 2025.

Revenue:

The total Revenue for April – June 2025 is \$3,688,023.58.

- The main sources of revenue include the IV-E Admin/Training & Other Federal, SCPA & Other State, Levy Funds, and FCM/IVE Waiver (Monthly).

Expenditures:

The total Expenditures for April – June 2025 is \$6,952,641.29.

- Salaries, PERS and Medicare are low because salaries are expected to increase with annual raises, but not until the union contract is finalized.
- There was an increase to Equipment due to the recent printer purchase. They were installed in June.
- Purchased Board and Care expenditures for the quarter were \$1,067,309.48. So far this year, the total cost is \$2,094,227.90. Last year Purchased Board and Care totaled \$4.9 million.
- Visitation Center Equipment totaled \$28,620.50, the cost of the down payment for the furniture (½ total cost). We were able to secure the price prior to a price increase in July.

The Beginning Fund Balance for April – June 2025 is \$15,462,115.63 and the Ending Fund Balance is \$12,197,497.92.

Discussion points:

- The annual budget for the Multi-System Youth (MSY) is \$497,934. There was no activity in the current quarter and \$89,380 for the previous quarter. The funds are spent during a fiscal cycle that begins in July, through June of the following year. In July 2025 we will begin spending more MSY funds and seek reimbursement. This funding stream coincides with ISP Cost- they go hand in hand.
- Best Practices is State funding, received once we hit certain measures. Some of the funds received from this line item will be used for the Connections Center furniture and the new timekeeping system.
- There are no current concerns with the new State budget. We will likely see a small increase in SCPA and Other State funding.

B. Policy 6.7 Fiscal Audit & Results

1. The 2025 County Monitoring Review Conducted by the Office of Fiscal Monitoring

The ODJFS Office of Fiscal and Monitoring Services (OFMS) completed a Monitoring Review. This review is typically done every three (3) years. We were notified of the review in October 2024. The review is now completed,

and we recently received the report with their findings. This is not an audit, and there are no fines or penalties associated with this review. There were two areas we were asked to correct:

1. The first was related to how the monthly lease invoices were being coded for the Connections Center. It was determined we cannot code the invoices for reimbursement because we were not yet occupying the space. This has already been corrected, procedures were updated, and the fiscal staff are aware of how to code the invoices properly.
2. The second was related to random moments. Casework staff are required to participate in the random moment sampling and must document their activities for a particular moment in time. Based on the activity, the agency receives reimbursements. The referral specialist positions will be required to participate in the random moment process; we have 4 staff in this position. The human resources department will revise the position descriptions and training will be provided to the referral specialists on how to complete the random moments. The target date for implementation is December, with the start of the next quarter for random moments.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

None.

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

None.

VIII. Announcements

None.

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: It was moved by Martin Heberling, seconded by Roberto Davila to adjourn the Board meeting at 6:08 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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| Ayes: | Lee Armbruster, Roberto Davila, Christina Doran, Martin Heberling, Jim Miller, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick, Kim Withrow |
| Nays: | None- 0 |
| Abstentions: | None- 0 |

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 20, 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:
Christina Doran, Board Secretary