

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, December 17, 2025 @ 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, Dan Gross, Martin Heberling, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick

Excused: Roberto Davila, Deborah Ortner, 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 December 17, 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 November 19, 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 1.2 Board Officers- Vote

November Board meeting recap:

Dan Gross nominated Jim Miller for Board Chair. Thomas Patrick seconded the nomination. Jim Miller accepted the nomination. Tamara Newton nominated Andrew Lipian for Board Vice Chair. Dan Gross seconded the nomination. Andrew Lipian accepted the nomination.

Board Chair Jim Miller opened the floor for additional nominations for Board Chair and Board Vice Chair, beginning on January 1, 2026. No additional nominations received; floor closed.

Jim Miller suggested the Board vote on the Board Chair and Board Vice Chair in one vote, given there was only one nomination for each position. The Board agreed.

Nomination received by Martin Heberling, seconded by Dan Gross to elect Board officers Jim Miller and Andrew Lipian to their respective positions.

MOTION: It was moved by Martin Heberling, seconded by Tamara Newton to approve Jim Miller as Board Chair and Andrew Lipian as Board Vice Chair, effective January 1, 2026, for a two year term. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

IV. Executive Director's Report

Kristen Fox-Berki thanked Director of Social Service Programs, Julie Haight and Director of Fiscal Affairs, Jessica Basinski for covering the November Board meeting in her absence.

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hire for the month of November:

1. Janine Pfeifenroth, DS Caseworker 11/17/25

Leave for the month of November:

1. Amelia Lord, DS Supervisor 11/25/25

B. LCCS Connections Center

The part needed to complete the County IT switch has not been received, but there has been some progress. Once received, the County IT department can complete their work to install the card readers for staff entry and the desk phones. Currently, staff are using their agency cell phones. One of the priorities for the 2025-2026 Management Plan is to evaluate the efficiency of operations at the Connections Center. Staff are meeting to discuss safety protocols and security measures. A suggestion was made by a staff member to transform one of the visitation rooms into a sensory room to provide a controlled environment that supports emotional regulation, enhances focus and promotes sensory skill development, to benefit individuals with sensory processing challenges. With planning, this could become a future consideration. The Board inquired about the recent leak in the roof and the part that was needed to repair the furnace. Both have been repaired.

C. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

Rania Assily shared an update with the Board. Tri-C has a large veteran's program, and Ms. Assily offered to connect the agency with their program manager for potential leads. Rania Assily invited the Board members to join the committee. A joint veteran's event with LCCS and Lorain County Veterans Service Commission (LCVSC) was held on November 19, 2025. The event was a success. This is a good

partnership, LCVSC have been very supportive of children services, and LCCS staff are meeting with them regularly. Rania Assily suggested reaching out to home schooling families and groups for foster care recruitment. A recruitment plan was drafted for 2026, which could lead to additional ideas for the subcommittee. Kristen Fox-Berki and Rania Assily will schedule another meeting.

Therapy Dog Update

Therapy dog, Kyra and owner Chrisine Spaetzel visited recently to tour the agency and introduce themselves to staff. Kyra was gentle and calm with staff, and the staff really enjoyed the visit. She will be back for another visit in January. We will also arrange a visit to the Connections Center. We do have some children in care that could benefit from a visit with Kyra, and we may try to schedule a visit with those children individually.

Holidays

The holiday season is upon us, and we have received lots of gifts for the children. We have wonderful support from our community partners, as well community members. Kristen Fox-Berki thanked them for their generosity. She also thanked Board member and Lorain County JFS Director Christopher Cabot for putting Thanksgiving baskets together and delivering them to our staff.

V. Fiscal Reports

None.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

1. Policy 6.7 Fiscal Audit & Results- Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review

The Ohio Department of Children and Youth conducted the 2025 preliminary Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review for review period October 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, to verify adherence to federal eligibility requirements and validate claims for reimbursement of foster care maintenance payments. Following the completion of the review, the one (1) case determined to be compliant with §472 of the Social Security Act. LCCS was successfully compliant with Title IV-E requirements. The agency will receive a full copy of the results of the review once they have been approved for posting. Kristen Fox-Berki thanked Jessica Basinski and her staff for a job well done.

2. APA Contract Approval

The contract is renewed each year with the prosecutor's office for the APA's that represent children services. This contract will be presented at the January Board meeting for approval.

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

MOTION: It was moved by Martin Heberling, seconded by Dan Gross to enter Executive Session to discuss litigation and personnel matters. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

Kristen Fox-Berki, APA Leigh Prugh and APA Dennis Quinlan met with the Board for Executive Session.

VIII. Announcements

The Board was provided with the 2026 Board meeting schedule. Board meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:00 p.m.

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: It was moved by Martin Heberling, seconded by Thomas Patrick to adjourn the Board meeting at 5:49 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 21, 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:
Martin Heberling, Board Secretary