

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, March 11, 2026 @ 5:00 p.m.

(Rescheduled from 3/18/26)

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, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Susan Nugent, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick

Excused: Christopher Cabot, Kim Withrow

Absent: Deborah Ortner

Also Present: Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director and Judge James T. Walther

1. Swearing In Ceremony for New Board Member

Board member Susan Nugent was sworn in by Judge James T. Walther.

Judge Walther thanked the LCCS Board for their ongoing support to LCCS staff as they continue to provide support for the families and children of Lorain County.

The Board invited Martin Heberling to attend tonight's Board meeting in recognition of his dedicated service to the LCCS Board, from December 2020 through December 2025. On behalf of the children and families of Lorain County, LCCS staff and the LCCS Board, Martin Heberling was honored for his commitment and selfless dedication.

B. Review Agenda

Board Chair Jim Miller asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Agenda submitted for the March 11, 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 February 18, 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

The Board plans to evaluate the need to pursue a levy later this year. A request was made to the Auditor's office to gather information. Further discussion will continue at the April 15, 2026, Board meeting.

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hires for the month of February:

1. Ryan Parsons, DS Caseworker 2/9/26
2. Jewel Schafer, DS Administrative Assistant 2/23/26

Leaves for the month of February:

1. Vickie Smith, FBC Support Caseworker 2/4/26

B. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with two handouts:

- QR Codes for Social Media Sites

The Board was asked to join and share the LCCS social media sites, including Facebook (main, foster parents, and Princess Ball pages), Instagram (main and Princess Ball), LinkedIn and YouTube, with the community, friends, family, etc. using the handout providing QR codes for each platform.

After School Program Organizer

Sometimes foster parents are unable to care for children immediately after school due to work schedules. The handout provided to the Board includes agencies, in various areas throughout the county, that are partnering with us to bridge the gap.

C. Policy 4.1 Pay Scale Non-Bargaining

Tabled due to ongoing contract negotiations.

Child Abuse Prevention

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. April 8, 2026, is “Wear Blue Day” for Ohio. We encourage everyone to wear blue in support. On April 8th, LCCS staff will have the option to wear blue to work and participate in a staff photo that will be shared across social media platforms. Pinwheels, which are a symbol of happiness and a happy childhood, were purchased to display for child abuse prevention month in front of the Connections Center and the Administration Building. Staff can share the pinwheels with community partners, to share with others. We will have pinwheels for the children visiting with their parents at the Connections Center, and a banner will be displayed in front of the building, along with the pinwheels. Kristen Fox-Berki invited the Board members to take some of the pinwheels to display and share.

Ensure They Shine Community Event

The Children and Families First Council (CFFC), in collaboration with LCCS, the Department of Children & Youth (DCY), Lorain County Job and Family Services (JFS), and Elyria Parks and Recreation are holding the Ensure They Shine event on April 25, 2026, from 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at the North Park Ice Arena in Elyria. The event will be funded through a DCY grant; it is free to the public. There will be crafts, food, giveaways and resource tables. The Board is welcome to attend.

Blue Sunday

To remember the millions of children who are victims of abuse/neglect, Blue Sunday Child Abuse Prevention is asking the faith community to pray on Sunday, April 26, 2026, in churches across our nation. In honor, a Blue Sunday Community Prayer Service will be held on Sunday, April 26, 2026 from 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. at Blessing House, in partnership with Ever Lifted Ministries of Education (EMLE) and LCCS. Kristen Fox-Berki invited the Board to attend and offered to send the event details to the Board. LCCS staff will be attending church services to share the opportunity to become a foster parent.

Community Advisory Network (CAN) Meeting

The next CAN meeting is scheduled for this Friday, March 13, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. via Teams. Riveon Mental Health and Recovery will share information regarding their recovery center, and LCCS will share information on kinship services and the 2025 Annual Report. The Board members were invited to attend. Rania Assily suggested the CAN meeting be recorded and shared on social media.

V. Fiscal Reports

A. Policy 6.3 Annual Budget (Presentation)

Director of Fiscal Affairs, Jessica Basinski, was invited to present the 2026-2027 Annual Budget. The document contains the Proposed 2026 budget amounts, Revised 2026, and Projections for 2027.

Notable changes from Proposed 2026 to Revised 2026

- There was a slight reduction in the Total Revenue (0.3%).
- Levy Funds were reduced based on the homestead exemption.
- The Total Expenses increased by 1.6%.
- Proposed 2026 Salaries were projected to be an increase of 3%. The Revised 2026 Salaries were increased to 4.5%.
- We anticipate vacation and sick time payouts for three (3) employees planning to retire this year.
- Under Services to Clients and Families, there were increases to Purchased Board and Care, KGAP and ISP Cost.
- Utilities decreased, as some were moved to the Connections Center.

2027 Budget Projection

- It is anticipated that the Revenue will increase by 1.5% from 2026 to 2027.
- Projections for Tax Collections will remain the same but could change based on the homestead exemption.
- Salaries were budgeted with a 4% increase. This could change based on union contract negotiations.

Discussion Topics

- It is possible that the Connections Center Rent could decrease if the note for the building was paid by the County.
- Placement costs continue to increase. There is a continuous effort to move children to less restrictive settings, which would reduce costs. The carryover continues to decrease each year.

- Martin O'Donnell inquired if the agency has an internal evaluation process for contracts, to ensure services are maintained to our satisfaction, and suggested that unresolved issues could be reported to the Board to help resolve them. Kristen Fox-Berki shared that several of the contracts are for self-sufficient services such as fingerprint, drug screens, etc. For contracts that provide services that should be evaluated, discussions are held with each vendor/agency prior to renewing the contract. The prosecutor's office is utilized for legal advice when appropriate. Contracts for cleaning and travel management are secured through the public bidding process, and their services are monitored internally.

1. Policy 6.3a Contracts

The Board was provided with, and reviewed, the LCCS master operational contract list, including contracts for the Connections Center.

Contracted Professional Services

The agency also contracts with individuals and agencies that provide specialized services for In-Home Parent Coaching, Music Therapy, Psychological Assessments for Children in LCCS Custody (no testimony), Psychological Assessments of Adults (with testimony), Psychological Assessments of Adults/Parenting Evaluation (no testimony), Crisis Intervention with Youth, and MEPA Assessments. Kristen Fox-Berki noted that for providers who are on insurance panels, the insurance is billed.

ODJFS Required Master Contracts with Child Placement Agencies

The Board was provided with the list of private foster agencies, residential treatment centers and group homes throughout the State with which LCCS may place a child during 2025 and 2026. ODJFS requires each Public Children Services Agency to have an ODJFS approved Master Contract with each entity. Kristen Fox-Berki noted that each facility listed with an asterisk indicates that we have at least one child placed in that facility.

2. Policy 6.3b Personnel Plan

The 2026 – 2027 Personnel Plan does not include any additional positions for the upcoming year. Several positions have been on hold and will continue to be on hold, including:

- 1 Scan Clerk
- 1 FBC Caseworker
- 1 Fiscal Account Clerk
- 1 Case Aide
- 1 Direct Services Supervisor
- 1 Administrative Assistant

There are three (3) retirements over the next year. As positions become vacant due to retirements, separations or resignations, they will be assessed based on need and the agency's financial health.

3. Policy 6.3c Major Purchases

One (1) vehicle is included in the 2027 draft budget with a projected total cost of \$30,000.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

1. Children and Families First Council (CFFC) Contract Approval

LCCS is the administrative agent for the CFFC, therefore, all CFFC contracts must be approved by the LCCS Board. CFFC does have their own budget, which covers all their contract costs.

LCCFFC FSY26 Master Contract List

Kristen Fox-Berki provided and reviewed the CFFC master contract list with the Board.

Provider Agencies

The Board was provided with a list of agencies that LCCFFC may use for child placements for 2026 and 2027. Their mission is to work with families on a voluntary basis to prevent children from coming into LCCS custody. As the administrative agent, LCCS is required to approve the Master Contract with each entity.

Rania Assily inquired about CFFC’s success rate with the children and families they serve. Kristen Fox-Berki offered to invite CFFC Director, Chelsea Freeman, to a Board meeting to provide a presentation on the services they provide and information regarding their outcomes.

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Dan Gross to approve the CFFC Master Contract List, and contracts with Provider Agencies. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	Lee Armbruster, Rania Assily, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Tamara Newton, Susan Nugent, Martin O’Donnell, Thomas Patrick
Nays:	One- 1
Abstentions:	None- 0

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 Tamara Newton, seconded by Roberto Davila to adjourn the Board meeting at 5:53 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 15, 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