

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, July 8, 2026 @ 5:00 p.m.

(Rescheduled from July 15, 2026)

I. Call to Order

Board Chair Jim Miller called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

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

Excused: Rania Assily

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 July 8, 2026, Board meeting. Under Executive Director's Report, Agenda Items IV.D. & IV.E. will be tabled until the August Board meeting. The Agenda stands, subject to the changes.

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 17, 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

Director of Fiscal Affairs Jessica Basinski was invited to join the Board to discuss the agency budget, as it relates to the levy. The Board was provided with Certificates of Estimated Property Tax Revenue, certified by the Auditor, that shows the current taxable value of the subdivision and the amount of revenue that would be produced by .35 mill, .40 mill and .45 mill levy. Jessica Basinski also provided the Board with projected budgets for each millage.

Discussion Points:

- Board member Martin O'Donnell requested Jessica Basinski to provide the Board with an estimated projection on how each millage would sustain the agency, based on the current number of children in custody and the current placement costs.

- Based on the projected budgets provided, .35 mill would not likely provide enough funds to carry us through to the next levy cycle. If the number of children in custody continues to increase, .40 mill may also be too low. The Board asked Jessica Basinski, based on the current projected budgets, which millage she would recommend. Although there are variables that could factor in a decision such as the number of children in custody and placement costs for the duration of the levy cycle, her recommendation would be .45 mill, as it is the most likely option to sustain the agency through both levy cycles.
- There are other county levies on the November ballot that could potentially compete against the LCCS levy.
- The current LCCS levy for 1.8 mill was passed by the voters in the November 2024 election, for years 2026 – 2030. The additional levy would be on a separate levy cycle, 2027 – 2031.
- The increased expenditures is due to the increase in the number of children in custody and placement costs, which have increased by 185% from 2024 – 2025. Kristen Fox-Berki was asked about cost saving measures the agency has taken thus far. The agency has reduced the number of staff through attrition. Every position is evaluated when someone leaves and some positions have been put on hold, saving between \$450,000 – \$500,000 per year. The number of vouchers issued has been reduced. When possible, staff are referring families to available community resources, including referrals to Job and Family Services (JFS) through the Prevention, Retention and Contingency (PRC) program, among others.
- There are currently more children placed in kinship homes than in foster homes. Some of the increase in the number of children in custody is due to the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KGAP), which offers financial assistance to kinship caregivers. The children must remain in agency custody while the kinship caregivers are licensed.
- Board member Kim Withrow suggested Kristen Fox-Berki contact Representative Gayle Manning regarding possible additional funding sources that might be available. Kristen Fox-Berki shared that the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) is working on legislation and advocating for additional funding for children services agencies.
- The need for an additional levy is essential to fund the ongoing operations of the agency. Children services agencies are required to find placements for children, regardless of the cost. Placement options and availability are often limited, causing an increase in placement costs statewide.
- Board Vice Chair Andrew Lipian suggested the agency consider a sliding scale for the foster care per diem as a cost saving measure. Foster care per diem costs range from \$42 - \$52 per day. There could also be a consideration to adjust the rate based on the number of children being placed. The Board approves the foster care per diem rates each year as outlined in the Board policies. Kristen Fox-Berki

shared that the agency has spent a great deal of time and effort moving children back to Ohio, and closer to home. There is currently only one child placed out of state, in a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF). PRTF's are privately owned, mainly for children with significant behavioral and mental health issues.

- Board member Chris Cabot shared his concern for the taxpayers absorbing the increase in placement costs and perpetuating the problem. He suggests looking at the problem on a systemic level and considering some changes.
- The Board inquired about the median home value for Lorain County. Board member Lee Armbruster stated that based on her search, the average home value in Lorain County is \$262,000.
- Board member Andrew Lipian inquired whether the Board could choose a millage outside of the options presented. Because the millage amounts were certified by the Auditor, they will need to choose one of the options provided.
- Board member Martin O'Donnell inquired about the possibility of having a combined human services levy for Lorain County that would fund LCCS and JFS to provide the taxpayers with some relief. Some counties have combined levies, including Cuyahoga County.

MOTION: It was moved by Roberto Davila, seconded by Dan Gross to request a .45 mill levy for the November 3, 2026, general election. The Ayes have the vote. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	6 - Lee Armbruster, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick
Nays:	5 - Christopher Cabot, Andrew Lipian, Tamara Newton, Susan Nugent, Kim Withrow

a. Resolution 07-2026-04

Levy Ballot Request:

The Lorain County Children Services Board hereby requests the Board of Commissioners to approve a Resolution to place the 0.45 mill additional levy to support services to abused and neglected children on the November 3, 2026, General Election Ballot for the years 2027-2031.

MOTION: It was moved by Jim Miller, seconded by Dan Gross to approve Resolution 07-2026-04. The Ayes have the vote. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

Ayes:	6 - Lee Armbruster, Roberto Davila, Dan Gross, Jim Miller, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick
Nays:	5 - Christopher Cabot, Andrew Lipian, Tamara Newton, Susan Nugent, Kim Withrow

Board member Chris Cabot reiterated that, based on the agency having the funding to carry through until the end of 2027 with current levy funds, the agency could have waited to place the levy on the ballot, providing an opportunity to do more groundwork and solidify the chances of passing the levy.

2. Policy 5.12 Executive Director Performance

Andrew Lipian, Roberto Davila and Rania Assily participated in the subcommittee last year. In Rania Assily's absence for today's meeting, this topic is tabled until the August Board meeting.

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hires:

1. Arica Schiely, DS Caseworker 6/1/26
2. Samantha Nickol, DS Caseworker 6/15/26

Leaves:

1. Tara Daniel, DS Caseworker 6/16/26

B. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

The plan is to meet with Cuyahoga County to collaborate on a recruitment plan with them. They are facing the same barriers as our agency. The goal is to combine resources and hold a recruitment event that could benefit both counties. We may also consider adding Medina County to increase the number of candidates for foster care.

C. Policy 5.14 Annual Management Plan

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the 2025 – 2026 Management plan. This Management Plan has been completed. The three priorities are:

1) Utilization of data to ensure practice standards and decision making

This strategy focused on the Direct Services and Family Based Care (FBC) departments, to increase the knowledge and skill of staff utilizing SACWIS reports. Staff meet regularly and the goal was accomplished with the assistance of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Department.

2) Evaluate the efficiency of operations at the Connections Center

A survey was completed, which was positive. The majority indicated that they felt the space allows appropriate visits, child and parent interactions, and they liked the playground. The new space is an improvement from the previous visitation rooms here at the agency. Connections Center staff meet regularly to assess safety and the needs of the children and families we serve; the meetings have been very productive. There is a deputy on-site to provide security. Additional security measures include the card reader, which is now installed and in use, as well as cameras.

3) New Timekeeping System

The new Timekeeping System, called TimeClock Plus (TCP) has been operational since January 2026, and is now fully implemented. This initiative was led by the fiscal department.

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the 2026-2027 Management Plan.

The three priorities are:

1) Utilization of Professional Development in DS Unit Meetings to Enforce Consistency in Practice Expectations.

The Direct Services (DS) department will focus on professional development by providing information on various topics during unit meetings, reinforcing best practice expectations.

2) Successfully Prepare LCCS Staff for Council on Accreditation (COA) Accreditation and Maintain Compliance with Standards

Lorain County Children Services is an accredited agency through COA. The intake process was completed. The CQI manager will meet with chapter leaders later this year to provide training, then a site visit will be held sometime next year. It costs about \$31,000 to participate in the accreditation process. COA provides standards across agency departments. Reaccreditation helps the agency remain consistent with best practice measures and occurs every five years.

3) Survey Staff Regarding Their Satisfaction Working at LCCS and Conduct Listening Sessions to Identify Action

Kristen Fox-Berki is scheduling meetings with staff to discuss their experiences with children services, learn what they enjoy about the job, and help gain insight from staff on how to improve. The meetings are divided by tenure, allowing for meaningful conversations at each level. Board member Martin O'Donnell asked if the Board could see the feedback received from the staff. Kristen Fox Berki shared that she had already sent the [unredacted] satisfaction survey results to staff and will provide them to the Board at the August Board meeting. The survey results were positive, but there is always room for improvement. One area of focus will be identifying ways to help staff feel supported by managers and directors.

D. Policy 7.14 Client Grievance

Tabled.

E. Policy 8.2 Strategic Plan Update

Tabled.

V. Fiscal Reports

A. Policy 6.1 Quarterly Financial Update

Quarterly Financial Statement as of June 30, 2026.

The Beginning Fund balance is \$6,061,286.39 and the Ending Fund Balance is \$8,923,448.85.

- The total Revenue for April – June 2026 is \$9,962,571.62.

- The two main sources of revenue for the quarter were Title IV-E Admin/Training and Levy Funds.
- The total Expenditures for April – June 2026 are \$7,100,409.16.
 - Due to the timing of the payment, Salaries and Benefits do not include the second quarter payment for health and life insurance, which is approximately \$825,000. This means we will make two payments next quarter.
 - Office Supplies and Agency Equipment
 - Vehicles- one vehicle was traded in, and we purchased a Chevy Equinox.
 - Services to Clients and their Families

Total placement costs for the quarter were approximately \$2.4 million:

 - Purchased Board and Care for the quarter totaled approximately \$1.6 million; year to date total is approximately \$3.3 million.
 - The total for Monthly Board and Care, KGAP and ISP combined was approximately \$832,000.
 - Facilities
 - Utilities include cell phone charges and the on-call center (Callnet)
 - Other
 - Other Expenses includes the payment to COA for reaccreditation, totaling approximately \$31,000.
 - The allocation to Children and Families First Council (CFFC) was \$22,616.27.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

Emma Morris, Public Relations and Community Events Coordinator, was introduced to the Board and shared information about the Princess Ball, our annual fundraiser for the Friends of Children Services to help fund the levy. Kristen Fox-Berki shared that last year was Emma's first Princess Ball, and she did a fabulous job. The Princess Ball is a fun event for families where children can meet and greet the princesses and collect autographs. The event is available to the public for \$15 per ticket. The Board was provided with a flyer and a sponsorship form to share with community members that may be interested in supporting the event. Last year the sponsorships made up most of the revenue. The Board is welcome to attend the event, or volunteer to help.

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 Andrew Lipian, seconded by Roberto Davila to adjourn the Board meeting at 6:03 p.m. Motion carried.

Roll Call Vote

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

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 19, 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:
Jim Miller, Board Chair