

Lorain County Children Services

Board Meeting

Wednesday, August 19, 2026 @ 5:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order

Board Chair Jim Miller called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m. at the Lorain County Administration Building, 226 Middle Ave., 4th Floor, Room A, Elyria, Ohio 44035.

A. Roll Call

Present: Rania Assily, Roberto Davila, Jim Miller, Martin O'Donnell, Thomas Patrick

Excused: Lee Armbruster, Christopher Cabot, Dan Gross, Andrew Lipian, Susan Nugent, Kim Withrow

Also Present: Kristen Fox-Berki, Executive Director

The Board does not have a quorum for today's meeting. Votes will be tabled until the September 16, 2026, Board meeting.

B. Review Agenda

Board Chair Jim Miller asked if there were any additions or changes to the Board Meeting Agenda submitted for the August 19, 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 July 8, 2026, Board meeting. Martin O'Donnell requested a revision to the minutes Under Agenda Item III.A.1. Levy. On page 3, under the 4th bullet point, the minutes should read "Board member Martin O'Donnell inquired about the *possibility in the future to examine* having a combined human services levy for Lorain County that would fund LCCS and JFS to provide the taxpayers with some relief." As there is no quorum for tonight's meeting, the Board will vote on the revised minutes at the September 16, 2026, Board meeting.

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 5.12 Executive Director Performance

Andrew Lipian, Roberto Davila and Rania Assily are on the subcommittee.

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board Subcommittee members with a binder.

Tabled until the August Board meeting.

2. Policy 7.14 Client Grievance

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with the Ombudsman Quarterly Report from April 1, 2026, through June 30, 2026, including the number of Grievances Filed, Public Complaints, Telephone Calls, Emails, Walk-ins, New Requests for Ombudsman Services, Pending Requests Resolved from Last Quarter, New Requests Resolved in this Quarter and Grievance Resolved in this Quarter. Kristen Fox-Berki reviewed the Pending Requests Resolved from Last Quarter.

3. Policy 8.2 Strategic Plan Update

Period 5: January 2026- July 2026

Strategic Plan Initiatives:

1) Goal 1: Safety

- **Objective 1** - Reduce the recurrence of maltreatment from 8.2% to no more than 7% by December 2026.
 - This objective has been completed. As of June 2026, the rate of Recurrence of Maltreatment is 4.4% (down from 5.7% in June 2025). We have excelled in this area.
- **Objective 2** - Reduce the number of children in congregate care from 26 to 12.
 - Our goal of decreasing the number of youths in congregate care to 17 was not met. We will consider carrying this objective over to the next strategic plan.
 - Although we did not achieve the goal of reducing the number of children in congregate care, the data does indicate improvements in reducing prolonged stays in congregate care. In June 2024, the total number of days children were in a congregate care setting was 8,617. In June 2026 this number decreased to 5,078 days.

2) Goal 2: Permanence

- **Objective 1** - Increase the percentage of children that exit agency involvement within 12 months of case opening from 65% to 80%.
 - We have not reached this goal. However, we are trending in the right direction. As of the end of June 2026, LCCS has seen 72 children enter custody and 90 children exit custody. In May alone, the agency exited 35 children from agency custody.
- **Objective 2** - Increase the number of caring, inclusive, and qualified LCCS foster families by 5% per year for the next three years.
 - We struggle with recruitment, increasing 5% each year. We have public events each month to recruit foster parents.
 - Last year 13 families were licensed for foster care. So far this year, another 11 families were licensed.
 - As of yesterday, 32 kinship caregivers have been licensed so far this year.
 - We currently have 15 youth in group homes and 12 in residential facilities. Congregate care placements have

decreased from 32 children in July 2025 to 26 children in July 2026. This is a 16% reduction in the number of children in congregate care.

3) **Goal 3: Wellbeing**

- **Objective 1** - Increase the number of children in non-kinship foster care who remain in Lorain County or Adjoining Counties. (Nov 2023 - 76%) Dec. 31, 2024 80%, December 31, 2025 90%, December 31, 2026 100%
 - *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** - Increase the number of siblings placed with some or all of their siblings when placed in traditional foster care. (Nov 2023 - 81%)
 - There was a slight decrease due to large sibling groups that have come into custody recently. Currently, 82% of children in traditional foster homes are placed with some or all of their siblings (81% of children in kinship foster homes/KGAP licensed).
- **Objective 3** - Increase the number of fathers (or non-custodial parent) participating in case plans from 62% to 80%.
 - Since the previous update, 82% of fathers have signed the family case plan.
 - This objective has been completed.

The next Strategic Plan update is scheduled to be presented to the Board in January 2027.

B. Unresolved Action Items

None.

IV. Executive Director's Report

A. Policy 4.6 New Hires/Leaves

New Hires:

1. Angel Perez, Ohio START Caseworker 7/6/26

Leaves:

1. Autumn Fisher, DS Caseworker 7/15/26
2. Robert Wilczewski, DS Caseworker 7/16/26
3. Gabriel Papineau, DS Caseworker 7/16/26
4. Sarah Boesger, DS Caseworker, 7/17/26

B. Employee Survey

A Satisfaction Survey was completed by staff in May/June. Out of approximately 140 staff members employed with the agency, 90 staff members responded to the survey.

Survey Questions & Response Summary:

1. How would you describe your role at LCCS?
 - The largest percentage that participated were caseworkers.
2. How long have you worked at LCCS?
 - Majority of respondents have worked at the agency for over 10 years.
3. How satisfied are you with the available tools and resources to complete your job?
 - Majority were satisfied.
4. How satisfied are you with your current work experience?
 - Majority were satisfied.
5. How safe do you feel while performing your job duties?
 - Majority feel safe.
6. How manageable do you feel your current workload is?
 - Majority indicated it is somewhat manageable. More information will be gathered.
7. Are expectations around workload and priorities clear and manageable?
 - 86% responded yes.
8. How confident are you in your ability to make a positive impact on the children and families we serve?
 - Most felt confident.
9. How satisfied are you with the benefits package offered by LCCS?
 - Majority were satisfied.
10. How satisfied are you with your current compensation?
 - 72% were satisfied.
11. How supported do you feel by your immediate supervisor?
 - This is a very strong, stable metric- staff feel supported by their supervisor.
12. How supported do you feel by the agency and organization leadership?
 - 26% feel somewhat or very unsupported- we are examining and collecting information to find ways to improve.
13. How well do you think your job responsibilities contribute to agency goals and core values?
 - Most responded well.
14. How satisfied are you with communication within your department?
 - 12% responded that we could do better.
15. How satisfied are you with training and professional development opportunities offered by the agency?
 - Majority are satisfied. This is a very strong area.
16. How likely are you to remain in your current position over the next year?
 - Majority are likely to remain in their current position.
17. What behaviors or practices most positively impact your day to day work experience?
 - These responses were provided in narrative format. The Board is encouraged to review the responses.

Kristen Fox-Berki reached out to staff with an opportunity to meet with her one-on-one to talk about the survey results and receive feedback on ways to improve and

provide support. There were four meetings scheduled and in total, 31 staff members participated. Next, Kristen Fox-Berki will attend unit meetings to continue discussions. One of the key items she has been focusing on pertains to how staff feel supported by the agency and organization leadership. In the meetings, staff shared they would like managers and directors to be more visible. This is something leadership will continue to look for ways to improve. The direct supervisors provide a great deal of support to caseworkers, helping them with decision-making, supporting them in the field and testifying in court. Regarding training, we have a training supervisor to help new caseworkers develop their skills, as well as assigned individual mentors that provide hands-on training. One identified area for improvement is training and onboarding for supervisors; this is an area that we plan to focus on. Martin O'Donnell shared his experience and successes with creating and developing a team leader role to help develop staff to become supervisors, as well as strengthen staff retention. Kristen Fox-Berki shared the agency has a similar approach through the peer mentor program. Peer mentors submit an application along with a recommendation. If selected, they are assigned to mentor a new employee. The Regional Training Center (RTC) is also available to staff for ongoing training.

C. Foster Care Per Diem

Last month, at the July 8, 2026, Board meeting, Board Vice Chair Andrew Lipian suggested the agency consider a sliding scale for the foster care per diem as a cost saving measure. This will be tabled until the September Board meeting when Andrew Lipian is present.

D. Policy 7.1 Present All Programs & Services Not Required

Kristen Fox-Berki provided the Board with a comprehensive list of programs provided by the agency. The required duties of a Public Children Services Agency (PCSA) are outlined in section 5153.16 of the Ohio Revised Code (ORC). They include:

1. Accept Reports & Investigate
2. Custody and Care.
3. Placement
4. Foster Care
5. Adoption

Services LCCS offers that are not required by the Ohio Revised Code:

1. Kinship Services
 - A dedicated kinship unit was established in 2017. Most recently, due to changes at the State level, the kinship assessors have been licensing eligible kin caregivers who are part of the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KGAP) process. When a kin caregiver is licensed, they then receive financial assistance from the federal or state government until the child in their care reaches the age of 18. We provide financial support to the County's kinship navigator program to assist them in providing needed services to our community's kinship families.

2. Lorain County Public Health Services
 - We have a long-standing service agreement with Lorain County Public Health to complete our 2-day physicals for children in care. The nurses go to the foster or relative home to complete these exams.
3. OhioSTART Casework Services
 - OhioSTART (Sobriety, Treatment, and Reducing Trauma) is an intervention program that brings together caseworkers, behavioral health professionals and family peer mentors to help families that are struggling with child maltreatment and substance use disorder. OhioSTART began in 2017 as a pilot project and is currently in 57 counties in Ohio. LCCS recently received OhioSTART certification.
4. Case Aide Services
 - Case aide services are instrumental in providing transportation and visitation support to families who have children in our care. This unit has one dedicated supervisor and four case aides. In addition, there is one Independent Living (IL) case aide that transports IL and emancipated youth to meetings, groups, activities, interviews, appointments etc.
5. Foster Care and Adoption Services
 - We could choose to contract foster care, however, LCCS employs caseworkers to recruit, train, license and support our foster caregivers and adoptive families. Once licensed, a unit of support caseworkers provide the necessary support to the licensed caregivers when children are placed into their homes. LCCS has a recruitment coordinator that works within the community to promote foster care at LCCS and recruit qualified foster parents.
6. Accelerated Safety Analysis Protocol (ASAP) Services
 - ASAP is a State initiative that prioritizes high risk cases. The ASAP Coordinator reviews these identified cases, then meets with the assigned caseworker and supervisor to determine how to proceed to manage risk factors and increase child safety.
7. Ombudsman Services
 - LCCS employs a part-time Ombudsman to accept and process complaints and grievances from clients as well as the public. The Ombudsman will meet with all individuals involved including clients, members of the public, and staff members.

E. LCCS Board Subcommittee Re: Foster Care Recruitment

Rania Assily attended the most recent open house; there was a strong turnout, and it was very impactful. Foster parents shared their experiences and why they chose to become foster parents.

A joint meeting was held with a foster care group from Cuyahoga County. There is a lot of crossover between Cuyahoga and Lorain counties. We are currently looking into the possibility of holding a foster care recruitment event at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and providing passes to attendees.

Levy

On July 17, 2026, the Commissioners approved a resolution for LCCS to place a .45 mill additional levy on the November 3, 2026, ballot. The levy approval was submitted to the Board of Elections. It will appear on the ballot as Issue 12.

Advertisements will be posted on billboards and yard signs, and Kristen Fox-Berki will attend community events. If Board members belong to civic groups within the community, please consider inviting Kristen Fox-Berki to attend and present on the levy.

Princess Ball

The annual Princess Ball will be held on Sunday, October 11, 2026, at the Spitzer Conference Center at Lorain County Community College. This is the agency's largest fundraising event. The Princess Ball flyer and sponsorship forms were provided to the Board.

CAN Meeting

The Board was given the September 18, 2026, Community Advisory Network (CAN) meeting invitation. The event will be held via Teams at 9:00 a.m. The agenda will include presentations from Neighborhood Alliance to talk about HMG, Ohio Guidestone to discuss the Lorain Health Center, Lorain County Children and Families First Council (CFFC) to share information about the Care Connection Respite Program, and Kristen Fox-Berki will provide LCCS updates and announcements. Rania Assily noted that she was having some difficulty with the registration link. Kriste Fox-Berki will check to make sure it is working properly.

V. Fiscal Reports

None.

VI. New Business

A. New Items for Discussion and Approval

1. Contract Approval

Tabled.

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

None.

VIII. Announcements

None.

IX. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 16, 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