

**Minutes of the Meeting
of the
Bergen County Board of Social Services
April 2, 2024**

PRESENT: **Randi Duffie, Vice-Chairperson**
Elaine K. Meyerson, Secretary Treasurer
Susan Silverstein, Assistant Secretary Treasurer
Tracy S. Zur, B.C. Commissioner, Board Member
Thomas J. Sullivan, Bergen County Commissioner, Board Member
Diane DeCarlo, Esq., County Adjuster
Alexandra Harwin, Esq., Board Member
Junior Hernandez, Ph.D., Board Member
John L. Schettino, Esq., General Counsel
Scott Modery, Director
Michele M. Darmochwal, Administrative Secretary

ABSENT: **William E. Connelly, Jr., Chairperson**
Yris Encarnacion, Board Member

A regular meeting of the Bergen County Board of Social Services was scheduled for April 2, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. in the 4th Floor Board Room of the Bergen County Board of Social Services, 218 Route 17 North, Rochelle Park, New Jersey.

PUBLIC SESSION:

John L. Schettino, Esq. called the meeting to order and read the notice required by the Open Public Meetings Act as follows:

"Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, adequate notice of the meeting scheduled for April 2, 2024 has been provided in the following manner:

1. By a prominent posting of the schedule of meetings for 2024, including a notice of the scheduled time, scheduled date, and location of this meeting at the Bergen County Administrative Building, One Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack, New Jersey.
2. The mailing of this notice of the time, date, and location of this meeting to "The Record", which was published on January 24, 2024 and to the Herald News, which was published on January 24, 2024.

- By filing of the notice of the time, date, and location of this meeting with the Bergen County Clerk, said filing having taken place on January 19, 2024.

A quorum being achieved, the Board met in Public Session.

PUBLIC SESSION:

Chairman William E. Connelly was absent. In his absence, Randi Duffie chaired the meeting.

Flag Salute

Randi Duffie led those present in a salute to the flag.

Roll Call

A Roll Call was taken for Open Session:

MEMBERS	TITLE	PRESENT	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON		X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X	
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X	
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASSISTANT SECRETARY TREASURER	X	
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X	
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X	
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X	
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER		X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X	
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X	

Open Public Comment Period

Randi Duffie requested a motion to open the meeting for public comment. A motion to open the Open Public Comment Period, for a three-minute limit with the option of speaking again, was offered by Alexandra Harwin, seconded by Commissioner Tracy S. Zur, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

There being no comments from the public, Randi Duffie requested a motion to close the Open Public Comment Period of the Open Session. A motion to close the Open Public Comment Period was offered by Elaine K. Meyerson, seconded by Susan Silverstein, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

Adoption of Minutes:

(a) Open Session Minutes of March 5, 2024

Randi Duffie requested a motion to adopt the Open Session minutes. A motion to adopt the Open Session minutes of March 5, 2024 was offered by Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan, seconded by Diane DeCarlo, Esq., and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

Geraldine Nestrowitz, Supervising Accountant, was present. She reported on the Bill’s List and Schedule of Vouchers.

Treasurer’s Report:

(a) Bills List and Schedule of Vouchers:

Randi Duffie requested a motion to approve the Bill’s List and Schedule of Vouchers. A motion to approve the Bill’s List and Schedule of Vouchers was offered by Susan Silverstein, seconded by Commissioner Tracy S. Zur, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			

TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

Administration Report:

(a) Monthly Reports – Statistical & Financial:

A snapshot of caseload and expenditures was included in each of the Board Member’s packets.

Scott Modery reported that the TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) caseload for February 2024 was 357 and January 2024 was 347 and compared to one year ago it went down 27 cases. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) caseload for February 2024 was 23,497 and January 2024 was 23,471 and compared to one year ago it went up by 1,100 cases. GA (General Assistance) caseload for February 2024 was 514 and January 2024 was 507 cases and compared to one year ago it went up by 104 cases. In regard to Medicaid, there were 47,516 individuals in February 2024 and in January 2024 there were 49,838 individuals a decrease of 2,322 individuals.

Burial stats are as follows: 35 inquires, 27 approved, and 1 denial. The agency paid out \$66,826.00 and recovered \$141.87.

In February 2024, the agency received 1,644 applications for cash and SNAP applications and 2,064 Medicaid applications for a total of 3,708. In January 2024, the agency received 1,933 applications for cash and SNAP applications and 2,618 Medicaid applications for a total of 4,551.

Our Emergency Assistance Unit assisted homeless individuals and families. Currently, we have 5 individuals/families in motels. We have 19 families in the HEARTS Program, 10 in the Emergency Shelter, and 9 in TANF/Bridge side. We have 10 families placed at the Center for Hope and Safety (DV shelter). We had 51 Emergency Assistance applications and 87 clients on Temporary Rental Assistance. We had 25 placements as referrals from 211. We have 240 active DDD cases. The Adult Protective Service (APS) Unit received 122 referrals and currently have 40 open cases.

(b) Memoranda to the Board

Scott Modery reported that at the March 5, 2024 Board Meeting there was a request made for some data as it relates to our email volume. We only have access to 30 days of individual email tracking as noted below:

Received from outside the agency:
65,000 emails a month.
30,000 emails get blocked for SPAM.
Average 3,015 emails on weekdays

Sent outside the agency:
16,887 emails a month.
830 emails on weekdays

While IT cannot investigate individual volumes longer than 30 days ago, they can access logs from as far back as October 2022. Comparing this general activity to present, our current server usage/activity has nearly doubled in this timeframe. Our first payment to upgrade our mail services is included on the Vouchers List this afternoon.

On March 26, 2024, Gerri Nestrowitz and Scott Modery attended our budget hearing at the County. Mr. Modery thought that the presentation and discussion was well received, and we will await formal approval. Documentation that was provided as part of our presentation at the budget hearing was distributed with Mr. Modery's monthly memorandum to the Board.

After seeing success equipping our Fraud Department, and subsequently our Adult Protective Service (APS) Department with official outerwear bearing a County insignia we have expanded to purchase outerwear for our Rooming House/Boarding Home field staff inspectors.

A resolution is listed on this afternoon's agenda to consolidate General Assistance from the Borough of Westwood. Next month, there will be a resolution to consolidate General Assistance from the Borough of Hillsdale. Once Hillsdale is added, Rutherford will be the only town remaining in Bergen County that administers their own General Assistance Program.

The building continues to have issues with elevators and parking. Mr. Modery is having ongoing conversations with the owner, building engineer, and John Schettino, Esq. regarding these issues and the best path to an acceptable outcome.

As a follow-up to the budget committee meeting held at the County, Commissioner Tracy S. Zur mentioned that she knows how difficult and challenging to follow up with some folks can be, but indicated we are dealing with a population that is dealing with trauma very often. She mentioned that we have to figure out a way of not just writing them off and letting them fall through the cracks. She is happy to have some conversations about setting up some Ambassadors specifically, on the SNAP side, and engaging our food pantries and being part of the contact piece to help some of these

folks with the paperwork or whatever it is that is needed to close these files and get them to be cases rather than statistics of failed contact. She expressed that she thinks we just need to be a little more creative rather than just saying or acknowledging that we cannot do anything about this.

Scott Modery indicated that we do what is in our power to make those contacts, but we cannot make people respond. We can definitely put together some issues, what is happening, etc. and try to address it from that point.

Commissioner Tracy S. Zur discussed that she thinks it is trying to figure out or find a force multiplier on the ground whether it is a church community, food pantry, etc. to help and support the agency. It is engaging the community to be a support team to enable these cases to get to a point of closure where people are actually able to access benefits. She indicated that those benefits are life lines for so many people and it pained her to feel like we are writing them off. She also indicated that engaging partnerships is helpful because then food pantry staff are willing to help in the SNAP application process but there has to be that partnership so we can educate them on what they need to do to help.

Scott Modery indicated as he mentioned at the budget hearing the Community Food Bank was previously involved. The short version of that story was they came back and said they could not reach them either.

In response to Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan's question regarding if we are allowed to share a customer's private information with someone else, Mr. Modery discussed that an agreement was put in place and the state got involved also. If we partner with another agency, we could curtail the agreement for that agency too.

In response to Alexandra Harwin's question regarding what is it that is holding them up and what is it that the customer needs to provide that they are not providing, Mr. Modery discussed that there are a variety of reasons but some include folks that are non-responsive. In some situations, they submit an application and then we cannot reach them, they do not do their interview, etc.

Alexandra Harwin, Esq. indicated that it is hard to gather this information and would expect that this would be a very difficult loop to close for every agency that does this work across the entire country. She thinks there probably is some research that exists in the world about what are things that are actually proven to increase response rates because it is a very difficult and recurring problem for everyone. She wondered if it is worth doing some sort of research into what is going on around the county to try to deal with this problem because it is not just our problem. It is everyone's problem.

Scott Modery explained there needs to be folks that continually try to reach out to the non-responsive applicant. A lot of applications are filled out online and questions on that application cannot be modified since it is dictated by the state.

Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan stated that the agency has a lot of cases that need to get processed and if the Board wants to hire more people that would increase the budget, then we could look into the people that do not respond. He said it sounds great, but it is a lot harder to do.

Elaine K. Meyerson mentioned that she thinks either Scott Modery or Yvonne Jordan needs to come back next month and have a summary of what percents drop, don't drop, and all the statistics involved with that.

Chairman's Report

Randi Duffie indicated that the discussion about SNAP eligibility is an important conversation. She asked that the Board continue reaching out with ideas and see where we can go with it.

In addition, Financial Disclosure Statements are due and must be filed by April 30, 2024.

Committee Reports:

(a) Welfare, Fraud, and Abuse Committee

Alexandra Harwin, Esq. reported from March 1 to March 31, 2024 the agency received Medicaid recoveries in the amount of \$1,807.22 and the year-to-date 2024 is \$4,778.44. No new cases were referred to the Prosecutor's office during the month of March.

(b) Audit & Budget Committee

No report.

(c) Building & Grounds Committee

A discussion will be held in Closed Session.

(d) Personnel Committee

Elaine K. Meyerson reported that the Personnel Committee discussed the April personnel requests at their monthly meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

None

(a) **Next Board Meeting Date**

The next Board Meeting is scheduled to be held in person on **Tuesday, May 7, 2024 at 4:30 p.m.**

Action Items:

Resolutions:

- (a) 2024.4.02 (1) – Resolution Approving Additions, Elimination, and/or Changes to Positions within the Bergen County Board of Social Services
- (b) 2024.4.02 (2) – Resolution Authorizing the Advertisement of Employment for Multiple Openings
- (c) 2024.4.02 (3) – Resolution Approving Contract Agreement with Director
- (d) 2024.4.02 (4) – Resolution Approving Confidential Employees Salary Increase
- (e) 2024.4.02 (5) – Resolution Authorizing a Change in Hours from Part Time to Full Time for One Internal Records Support Technician 1
- (f) 2024.4.02 (6) – Resolution Authorizing a Change in Employment for One Internal Part-Time Human Services Aide, Part-Time Human Services Aide Bilingual in Spanish, Full-Time Clerk 1, Full-Time Clerk 1 Bilingual in Spanish, Full-Time Records Support Technician 1, Full-Time Mail Clerk, Full-Time Data Entry Operator, Full-Time Keyboarding Clerk 1 or Full-Time Keyboarding Clerk 1 Bilingual in Spanish to One Full-Time Human Services Aide Bilingual in Spanish
- (g) 2024.4.02 (7) – Resolution Approving Transfer of Public Assistance Program from the Borough of Westwood
- (h) 2024.4.02 (8) – Resolution Providing for a Meeting Not Open to the Public in Accordance with the Provisions of the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A

A motion to table Resolutions (c) - (d) on the agenda was offered by Alexandra Harwin, seconded by Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

A motion to approve Resolutions (a), (b), (e) (f) and (g) on the agenda was offered by Alexandra Harwin, seconded by Susan Silverstein, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X

RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

A motion to discuss and approve Resolution (h) 2024.4.02 (8) Providing for a Meeting Not Open to the Public in Accordance with the Provisions of the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A 10:4-12 and to go into Closed Session was offered by Commissioner Tracy S. Zur, seconded by Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

The Board went into Closed Session at 5:00 p.m.

CLOSED SESSION:

The Board went into Closed Session to discuss personnel matters, building issues, negotiations, and Closed Session minutes. The minutes from the Closed Session will be available to the public once the items have been resolved or no longer require the minutes to be held and not distributed to the public. The Board will be in Closed Session for approximately 30 minutes at which time the Board will reopen the meeting and may take further public action in matters dealing with the Bergen County Board of Social Services. The public will be able to access the meeting remotely once the meeting reopens in Open Session.

OPEN SESSION:

The Board reconvened in Open Session at approximately 5:50 p.m.

For the record, Elaine K. Meyerson left the meeting at this time.

A motion to untable and approve Resolutions (c) and (d) was offered by Alexandra Harwin, seconded by Susan Silverstein, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER				X
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

Adoption of Minutes:

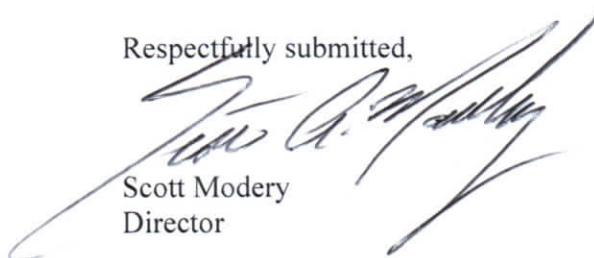
A motion to approve the Closed Session minutes of March 5, 2024 was offered by Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan, seconded by Susan Silverstein, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER				X
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

Randi Duffie requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. With no further business to conclude, a motion to adjourn the meeting at approximately 5:52 p.m. was offered by Commissioner Tracy S. Zur, seconded by Commissioner Thomas J. Sullivan, and approved as follows:

MEMBERS	TITLE	AYE	NAY	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
WILLIAM E. CONNELLY	CHAIRPERSON				X
RANDI DUFFIE	VICE CHAIRPERSON	X			
ELAINE K. MEYERSON	SECRETARY TREASURER				X
SUSAN SILVERSTEIN	ASST. SECRETARY TREASURER	X			
TRACY S. ZUR	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
THOMAS J. SULLIVAN	BERGEN COUNTY COMMISSIONER	X			
DIANE DECARLO, ESQ.	COUNTY ADJUSTER	X			
YRIS ENCARNACION	BOARD MEMBER				X
ALEXANDRA HARWIN, ESQ.	BOARD MEMBER	X			
JUNIOR HERNANDEZ, Ph.D.	BOARD MEMBER	X			

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Modery". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Scott Modery
Director