

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 25, 2008 MEETING
MCSSA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MCSSA OFFICE

LANSING

<u>Those Participating</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>District</u>
<i>In Person:</i>		
Steve Barnes	Mecosta	III
Susan Haut	Mecosta	III
Jim Turner	Huron/Tuscola	V
Mel Haga	MCSSA	
Shelley Jipson-Lomax	MCSSA	
<i>By Phone:</i>		
Jay Bortz	Allegan	IV

I. Meeting Called to Order at 10:05 a.m. by Co-Chair, Jim Turner.

II. Disposition of Minutes of February 26, 2008

Correct the spelling for Kathryne O'Grady. Jay Bortz moved to accept as corrected.
Seconded. Motion carried.

A. Agenda Updated.

III. Reports

A. DHS – Mary Mehren was not in attendance.

IV. Unfinished Business

A. Legislation

SBs 543, 666, and HB 4818 are not moving in the legislature. No update.

B. February Legislative Committee Action on HB 5418

Jay reported on his recommendation. It is his understanding that the Legislative Committee defeated our recommendation based on the invasion of privacy issue. The committee understood the issue of the harm smoke causes, but felt more strongly about the civil rights issue.

Jay drafted a memo to the Legislative Committee asking them to reconsider their action and support HB 5418. Law enforcement can handle the enforcement. It will not likely be a primary violation meaning that smoking in the vehicle would not be the primary reason for stopping a vehicle, but if the officer becomes aware of the driver smoking when stopped for a moving violation, and there is a child in the vehicle the driver can then be cited for the smoking violation as well as the moving violation.

There was further discussion about the age of the child. The committee felt that if the child is young enough, or small enough, to be bound by the car seat or booster seat requirement, then the automobile in which the child is riding must be smoke free.

Jay Bortz moved to resubmit our recommendation to the Legislative Committee with the age of the child being increased to 18. Seconded. Motion carried.

Steve urged committee members to attend the Legislative Committee meeting, or at least phone in, on April 8 at 3:00 PM.

V. New Business

A. Board of Director Referral

The Board of Directors has discussed the issue of the foster care system. The end result of that discussion is a charge to our committee to talk with the director of OCAL, Jim Gale. Foster care licensing is viewed as a right not a privilege and we need to change that perspective. There are some instances where homes have to be licensed simply because the individuals have no criminal conviction or a preponderance of evidence does not exist, and the home has sufficient space to meet the requirements. The Child and Family Services Committee needs to look at the licensing requirements for possible improvements. The point was made that county commissioners need to be aware of this as well. We may need their support in getting rules changes. This is not just a DHS issue as private agencies license foster homes as well. Another issue is the lack of training for investigators in terms of licensing.

Jay researched the issue and got a lot of background information on the Office of Child and Adult Licensing. Apparently DHS licenses the homes under state regulations. There is some subjectivity however. With family-to-family being the focus there is an increased urging to utilize family members for the provision of “foster care” services.

The licensing of DHS county offices is in some instances in jeopardy as there is an insufficient number of staff in some counties to meet the requirements. This committee, and ultimately the association, recommended that each county office have a dedicated licensing staff member.

Mecosta County has hired two foster care workers, one from Wayne County and one from the street. This hiring is to fill vacancies that have existed for some time; but these are not licensing staff.

Jim Turner noted that his county has a dedicated licensing specialist in his office by way of creating a dedicated position from 4/10 of one position, 2/10 of another, etc. Even if this dedicated person had to take care of two or three counties it would be better than the way the system works now.

Jay expressed concern about the times that a child is placed with a relative and there may have been previous investigations of the family member with whom the child is being placed, but without a preponderance of evidence. On the flip side, there are many cases where the child has thrived when placed with a family member, but the home would never have been approved as a foster care home.

The decision was made to invite Jim Gale from OCAL, as suggested by the Board of Directors. Jay asked for the licensing requirements to be shared with the committee; however, the manual is about the size of a Sears catalog, and they are constantly changing. Members were encouraged to get a copy of the requirements from their county office. Requirements for licensing by the private agencies, and licensing of family homes, must be the same as the requirements followed by DHS.

We need the homes of the past where the goal is reunification. The reason Sue raised the issue of foster care licensing is because of the legislation being proposed and the lack of sufficient staff to do the job now, let alone with new rules.

Mel will sort out the issue and provide information to committee members before meeting with Mr. Gale.

B. Legislation

1. HB 5828 – Provides for retroactivity for posthumous adoptions and medical assistance payments; allows an adoption of a deceased individual in a specific case in Bay County. Jay didn't feel that this bill even applies to us. They want to allow someone who has died to be adopted so that the family who paid the medical bills can be reimbursed. Jay didn't feel that we should be involved as the bills we review should be more global. Jay Bortz moved that we take no action. Seconded. Motion carried.
2. HBs 5836 and 5837 – Prohibits state from paying for services to a public ward placed in child placing agency or child care institution that is not accredited. Prohibits state funds to cover cost of court entering a disposition to place juvenile who is a public ward in a public or private institution that is not accredited. Sue reviewed the bills and she provided her recommendation in writing after a thorough review. The statutes would only apply to state wards who are the kids with serious juvenile delinquency issues. One concern is that the sponsor of HB 5836 is the House Democrat who has been espousing privatization, and this bill requires that the child placing agency must be accredited. None of the counties are accredited as child placing agencies. This accreditation is a very expensive, lengthy process. Jay Bortz moved to table further discussion, asking Mary Mehren for a departmental position on the bills. Seconded. MAC has a real interest in these bills because of the implications for the child care fund. MAC is forming a work group to look at the issue. Mel will work with Ben Bodkin from MAC. Motion carried.

3. HB 5930 – Jim Turner reviewed the bill that would result in implementing a voucher system for services or financial assistance. Why we would want to move to a county voucher system for counseling is beyond us. If a person has the credentials to provide the service you can be listed on the statewide provider list. Each provider is able to designate counties that he/she will serve. From working with the various providers over time the counties know who is effective and who is not, or in what areas each provider specializes. Allowing the person for whom the service is to be provided to select the provider may not result in the best match for the individual. Sue Haut moved to table until further information is available. Seconded. Motion carried.
4. HB 5931 – Jim reviewed this bill as well, which would prohibit immunity for certain human services employees. Our staff is asked to do God-like things and make God-like decisions, and do the best they can. The agency policy is that if you knowingly ignore or violate policy you will be held responsible and are liable. This bill is reactionary, does not include the term “knowingly” and the timing couldn’t be worse. You could put a protective services specialist in a home 24/7 and if the desire of an individual is to harm a child, the harm will occur. Sue Hart moved to oppose. Seconded. Motion carried.

C. Draft Letter to Representative Jim McDermott

Mary Mehren has reviewed the letter in support of the Investment in Kids act is in agreement with its being sent. Sue read most of the Investment in Kids Act and found some items that appear to compete with one another. Investing in Kids is, of course, something we support, but the price tag may be too high. Sue Haut moved to forward the draft to the Legislative Committee with the recommendation that they urge the Board of Directors to send the letter.

D. Oklahoma Editorial

Jim circulated this article throughout his office and their response was, “Are they kidding?”

More than anything, this is an interesting FYI.

E. Back-to-School Clothing Allowance

Sue mentioned that the back-to-school clothing allowance only goes to children in families receiving cash assistance. Mecosta County has 287 units (either individuals or families), yet approximately 5000 food stamp and/or Medicaid recipients. If the clothing allowance were to be provided to all children in these households the cost would much higher, obviously.

Mel has three surveys from past years that show that families do use the money for children’s clothing. There is an effort underway to mandate that the families/department show how the money is spent or that vouchers be provided for retailers. We need to help our lawmakers understand that our clients shop at

garage sales, thrift stores, etc. and the vouchers would not be acceptable in these circumstances.

VII. Meeting Adjourned. Next meeting is April 22.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelley Jipson-Lomax

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF APRIL 22, 2008

AGENDA

- I. Call to order at 10:00am
- II. Disposition of the minutes of March 25, 2008
 - A. Agenda update
- III. Reports
 - A. DHS – Mary Mehren
- IV. Unfinished Business
 - A. Legislation
 - 1. SB 543 –
 - 2. SB 666 –
 - 3. HB 4818 –
 - B. Report on Legislative Committee Response to HB 5418 Recommendation
 - C. Foster Care Licensing – Inviting Jim Gale to Attend Meeting
- V. New Business
 - A. Legislation
 - 1. HB 5910
 - 2. HB 5984
 - 3.
- VI. Adjournment