

**Tioga County Department of Human Services  
Advisory Board  
March 15, 2023  
12:00 noon**

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**Board Attendance:** Isobel Anderegg, Commissioner Erick Coolidge, Amy Coots, Kristin Hamilton, Commissioner Mark Hamilton, Tanya Harmon, Holly Lamonski, Ben Largey, Timothy McBride, Saira Olson, Seth Watkins

**Guest Attendance:** Robin, Adams, Jenny Bowen, Janice Chamberlain, Nancy Clemens, Gwen Deyoung, Bill Dinger, Nikki Luckovich, K. Irene Morgan, Mellissa Parsons, Marc Rice, Laurie Roof, Hazel Smith-Guild, Diane Weed, Diane Weed, Mary Wilson

**Remote Attendance:** Margaret Dunning- Smith, Christa Hilfiger, Jim Schu, Katie Seiders, Renee Smith, Sue Sticklin Jennifer Stubbs, Antonia Whittle

**Call to Order:** Saira called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence.

Saira states “The Tioga County Department of Human Services Advisory Board will facilitate the Public Hearing regarding the 2023/2024 Human Services Plan from 12:00 p.m.- 1:00 p.m. The purpose of these hearings is to inform the public and solicit stakeholder input. During the Public Hearings any member of the public is invited to provide testimony, verbally or in writing, regarding the plan.”

The advisory board made introductions of themselves to the public.

**Secretary’s Report:** Holly asked the Advisory Board to review the minutes from the November 2022 meeting. Holly asked if there were any questions, concerns, discrepancies. No voiced concerns. Kristin made a motion to accept the minutes as presented, Commissioner Coolidge Seconded. 13Ayes, 0 Nays. Motion carried.

**Treasurer’s Report:** Sara states that at the end of February 2023, the balance is \$6,618.00. We received \$1,640.00 in donations from the 2022 Christmas Appeal. Saira made a motion to approve the treasury report as presented, Commissioner Coolidge seconded. 13 Ayes, 0 Nays. Motion Carried.

**Agenda Items:**

Nikki Luckovich begins by giving an update regarding mental health in Tioga County. Tioga County currently has 40 active cases that we are following with 5-10 new referrals each month. We currently have 6 individuals at Clarks Summit State Hospital, which is higher than some of the other counties based on the county’s population. It is challenging to divert individuals away because we don’t have any housing options with 24-hour supervised housing, which is a step down from a state hospital, so these individuals end up staying longer in the state hospital than they should. We have been outreaching to any Tioga County resident that has been 302’d involuntarily in the hospital. Since the hospital isn’t in county, the base service unit staff reaches out to the hospital to coordinate services once they are out. Most of the providers have wait lists due to staffing issues. Through the Systems of Care grant, in February we distributed 50 calming bags to children & youth, to the courthouse, to EMS, and to the police department. We plan to distribute 50 more in April. Calming bags are backpacks with a journal, bottle of water, fruit snacks, and age appropriated activities. It has been recommended that we put personal care

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products in there, so we will be implementing that in the next round of bags. We are always looking for volunteers to fill the bags, so if anyone is interested, please feel free to reach out. We are meeting with Judge Wheeler on March 22<sup>nd</sup> regarding implementing a calming room at the courthouse. Question—Has there been any improvement finding mental health placements for those that come in the emergency departments and hospitals? Tioga County has had a few children that have had to sit in the emergency room for a little bit until we can find a placement for them. While in the emergency room, they are not receiving mental health treatment/services, they are just housing them until we can get them in a facility.

This is a problem across the state. A few units have opened but they are having difficulties with staffing. If they don't have staff, they are at capacity and cannot accept referrals. This problem is not exclusive to Tioga County, it is happening across the state. There has not been any improvement, but it hasn't gotten any worse. Commissioner Coolidge comments that this is a universal problem in every aspect regardless of the demographics. Mental health individuals should not be in an incarcerated environment, the county cannot handle those circumstances appropriately that need a specific kind of care. We need a greater level of voice to address those circumstances. We need to be thinking more abstractly because the need is monumental. Ben Largey brings attention to a positive note, while there is a need for crisis and emergency services for mental health, over the last 20 years, he has seen an increase in services offered to all kids in schools for different levels of care including family team meetings, outpatient treatment services through CONCERN at the school, the CSBDH program, mental health counselors in the school, guidance counselors, and school psychologists.

Sara called upon the Tioga County providers to offer what they are seeing regarding trends to solicit stakeholder input to take into consideration for our 2023/24 block grant plan.

Gwen from Wellspring states they have recently hired two individuals that are in wheelchairs, and they would like to see automatic door openers to make it more wheelchair accessible for the employees and their clients. Gwen is requesting funding to have this put into place. Commissioner Coolidge states that they were unaware of this issue and now they are. They will make sure to take care of this.

K. Irene Morgan states in order to serve their individuals, it has to fit within their client's budget that has been developed based on the cost of their service. The office of developmental programs is out of touch with reality. Over the last 5 years, things have gotten worse. Many of you know we are experiencing a huge crisis with providers closing throughout the state. There are over 5000 people since before COVID that are not receiving services. They will increase the waiver dollars, which is great, but they are basing their costs from 20 years ago. Transportation has been a big problem. Commissioner Coolidge states Governor Shapiro is receptive to the needs and much of what you just offered is in discussion. This is a priority at our spring conference this week. This problem is not just in Tioga County.

Jenny from CONCERN states the lack of qualified staffing, licensure requirements, and reimbursement rates for services are our three biggest barriers. Last year I referenced an idea to meet a need, a need for schools to have supports for engagement. They are engaging those individuals who are not ready,

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willing, or interested in services. We currently have this service in place in Berks County and it is going well. I think we are ready to have a conversation regarding this service for Tioga County. Question- would this be in all three school districts? Yes. The staffing that we need to do this would need lower credential requirements, because they are just engaging and not providing the services. Question- is there anyone aware of any incentive programs that's available for mental health providers to practice in a rural setting? In the school districts the state provides reimbursement for different programs for teachers and if they teach in a rural setting for a certain amount of time, they may get money towards their loans. Sara- The Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural Pennsylvania (BHARP) is implementing a Higher Education Program that counties can join—we will get 3 slots. This program allows students to do an internship and then get part of their senior year paid, up to \$20,000, for as long as they commit to an organization, like CONCERN or Crossroads, for 2 years.

Saira calls upon the Advisory Board for one member to be the advisory board representative for the second hearing for Block Grant and hear the HSS proposals during this meeting on May 2, 2023 at 9:30 a.m. Tim McBride volunteers.

Commissioner Coolidge calls upon Robin Adams. It has been brought to his attention that suggests on social media that she is the founder of Tioga Overdose Fatality Review Team. Can you elaborate on that for me and what it entails. Robin's response "It doesn't entail much right at the moment, just \$10,000 from the state for a plan that I was able to write. The plan lays out the very basic building blocks of what an OFR should do and can do. That was submitted back in August and approved late October/early November, that is as far as it has gone. I have been looking for an entity other than I'mPACT and doing some research and thought quite possibly some connecting counties that are doing this can use their SCA's. There is a communications insert, that you can type questions into and people will respond to you within your state and country. I asked the question of existing Pennsylvania OFR's, that analyst is typically housed within the county, and most of their responses have come back from the county Department of Health. The Dept. of Health's vary from 1-2 staff persons for smaller rural county vs. 12-14 attached to a Dept. of Health for a larger area. That seems to be the most popular place for an analyst and is usually what they are called and they facilitate the OFR meaning pulling people from the university, from your medical systems. They are not investigative, they are just co-fact finding afterward so it cannot be any type of law enforcement surrounding or open investigation surrounding. It has to be one that is not under investigation. Most started three years back and they try to do quarterly."

Question from Commissioner Coolidge- If I read from statute, in counties where there is a local health department, the local health department shall be the lead organization to oversee and coordinate the death review team in a form and manner as prescribed by the department. In contingent in choosing an established death review team, if there is not a local health department, which I think Terri Byrd represents, an organization interested in being selected as the lead organization shall submit an application, in a form and manner as prescribed by the department, for review and approval. Prior to

submitting an application, a county's commissioners shall approve the submission of an organization as a lead organization. I do not remember signing it, Commissioner Hamilton agrees. Robin- "I did not submit an application Commissioner. This was a plan for seed money for an organization in a community to get people to a table. This hasn't reached legislation." Commissioner Coolidge "I understand that, however on the announcer, it says that you are designated as the founder and we haven't signed anything. So that is misrepresenting the facts. Robin- "No, this is not misrepresenting the facts. I've only talked to 7-8 people: the Deputy Coroner, two professors at MU. This is just a thought. It is funded based on work that I did- a very tiny amount \$10,000." Commissioner Coolidge- "But where is that money?" Robin- "We can discuss this later, it has not been received yet. It is still coming because I wasn't an entity that could do a digital credit card with the Commonwealth." Commissioner Coolidge- Thank you, I just wanted to know the basis behind it.

Kristin motioned to close the TCDHS Advisory Board Meeting, Amy seconded. Meeting Adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Submitted by:



Holly Lamonski  
Secretary



Sara J. Rice  
Administrator of TCDHS