

**Tri-County Opportunities Council  
Board of Directors Meeting  
November 28, 2023**

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chair Harmon.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Jacobs, Board Secretary, took roll call. A quorum was present.

**Members Present:** (In-person participants are bolded)

Sue Britt; Susan Bursztynsky; Robin Camplain; **Mary Cork**; David Ditzler; **Al Harmon**; **Bob Henkelman**; Marcia Heuer; **John Hockstadt**; **Tom Howes**; Betty Johnson; Lisa Johnson; **Julie Jacobs**; Betsy Kinder; **Ron Kleppin**; **Donna Koehler**; Michael McEmery; **Ginny McPerryman**; Inga Neuner; **Linda Pennell**; Ronald Preston; Juanita Randklev; **Angela Shippert**; **David Torres**; **Marissa Trumper**; Jeanne Vargas; Laura Watters.

**Members Absent:**

Charlotte Balensiefen; Karla Belzer; Mary Jo Credi; Bernene Dahl; Kim Dahl; BJ Holocker; Don Koehler; Kenneth Krogulski; Brad Lindstrom; Derek Whited; Lorene Winfield.

**Others Present:**

Jill Calkins; Rachael DeSpain; Dawn Kanzler; Brandi Newell; Tammy Saenz; Wayne Thompson; Neddie Watts.

**Minutes:**

The October 26, 2023 Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried.

**Financial Report:**

The September 2023 Financial Reports were provided to the membership prior to tonight's meeting for review. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept the September 2023 Financial Reports and file for audit. Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Personnel Committee Report:**

Mr. Harmon provided a report on the work completed by the Personnel Committee.

**TCOC Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual:**

Mr. Harmon and Ms. Calkins shared and explained updated and new policies the committee had worked on during November. The committee was recommending approval from the full Board. All policies would be added to the Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual, effective January 1, 2024. At members' request, each policy was voted on individually.

Ms. Camplain made a motion to approve the Paid Time Off (PTO) policy to replace the current Vacation policy. Mr. Henkelman seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the Pregnant Women Fairness Act, Providing Urgent Maternal Protections policy. Ms. Camplain seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Burzstynsky made a motion to approve the Email Signature Template and Pronoun policy. Ms. Watter seconded the motion. Discussion followed. A vote was called, and the motion passed 24 – 3.

President/CEO's Performance Appraisal and Compensation:

Mr. Harmon aggregated the scores from the performance appraisals submitted by the Board Chair, members of the Board Personnel Committee, and staff members who work directly with and are supervised by Ms. Calkins. The final performance appraisal was presented with a score of 4.86. Mr. Harmon stated that the personnel committee had a long discussion and was recommending to the full Board a 4.5% raise for Ms. Calkins, effective January 1, 2024. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the 4.5% wage increase, and Mr. Henkelman seconded the motion. The question was asked, and Mr. Harmon explained how they arrived at the 4.5% increase. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler**

Ms. Kanzler sought Board approval to accept the United Healthcare renewal rates for medical insurance effective January 1, 2024, as per the recommendation of the Personnel Committee. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to accept the renewal rates. Mr. Howes seconded the motion. Discussion followed. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Kanzler next sought Board action to approve the selection of the Sikich Audit Firm to conduct the 2023 Agency-Wide Audit and 403(b) Retirement Plan Audit as recommended by the Board Audit Committee. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve Sikich as the 2023 Audit Firm. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. Discussion about the RFP and selection process followed. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

The ending book balance for October was (\$108,248.01), and a balance of \$494,209 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of October 31, 2023. She explained that while funds from DCEO slowed, they have begun to flow regularly again.

The 5500 for the retirement plan still needs to be amended. CLA is working on gathering items and pulling samples from participant accounts. They expect a letter from DOL asking for an amendment within 45 days. They have not received this letter as of yet. She explained that since there is no Board meeting in December, the Executive and Audit/Finance Committee may need a virtual meeting to approve the document for filing. Ms. Kanzler will contact the committee members once the document is finalized.

The final report letter from the Illinois Department of Human Services Fiscal Administrative Review from August is in tonight's handouts, printed on ivory-colored paper. The letter stated that there were no material findings or recommendations.

Members were reminded that the November Financial Statements will be mailed in December to be accepted and filed for audit on January 23, 2024.

### **Program Reports:**

#### **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts**

Ms. Watts reported that staff have been busy reviewing their CSBG caseloads to determine which ones will be closed before the end of the year and which ones will need to be rolled over. At the January Board Meeting, she will provide a graphic to show a trend of CSBG intakes from 2020 to 2023. She stated that the numbers are very interesting, showing a significant decrease in certain months compared to other years.

The new Department of Human Services (DHS) Rapid Rehousing Program started great by quickly housing homeless households and providing supportive services to help sustain their housing. Staff are eager to help these households, and many have taken customers shopping to purchase basic living supplies to put into their new homes. Households are not only impacted by this, but the staff is enjoying every minute of it and it is bringing their passion for helping others to the forefront! She shared a couple of impact stories from the program with the Board.

Beginning January 1, the Whiteside County office will move to its new location in Rock Falls at the Coloma Township building. The building is being turned into a community building inclusive of a lending library for all ages, an arts and crafts room, an eating area, and a thrift store of donated items that would be sold for no more than one dollar on most items included feminine products, baby items, and other products that are not easily accessible for a household on SNAP. The Township will also provide general assistance and an assessor office where senior citizens can apply for the Senior Homestead and Freeze applications.

#### **Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell**

Ms. Newell reported that the program remains strong this fall. The volunteer count remained at fifty, with several grandparents on leave due to illness and injury. This trajectory has caused us to welcome a few new volunteers to our ranks. Two new volunteers were welcomed to the program this week as they begin new volunteer orientation and attend our December in-service this Friday. The two new volunteers will serve minimal hours unless, and until there is a greater need allowing them to serve more.

Foster Grandparents enjoyed their November 3rd in-service. Sterling PD Detectives joined them to educate volunteers on current scams and how scammers target seniors. President/CEO Jill Calkins presented to the volunteers on the LIHEAP program.

**Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain**

Ms. DeSpain informed the membership that on November 20, 2023, the Office of Head Start put out a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) with a focus on workforce compensation and benefits, integration of mental health services, and continuous quality improvement, including family service caseloads. They will be taking comments until January 19, 2024. Ms. DeSpain will be participating in workgroups to have a unified voice for comments. While these could be positive changes for the Head Start program, they would be next to impossible to implement without additional funding.

The request to reduce the number of Head Start slots has finally been approved. As of early November, full funded enrollment is 483. 367 Children and families are served by the Head Start Program and 116 by the Early Head Start Program.

Ms. DeSpain sought Board approval to submit an application for the Early Head Start and Head Start 5-Year Project Period Grant. The budget included in the grant will be for the program period of April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025. The total funding is \$8,130,756. Of this amount, \$6,502,857 serves Head Start children (367), and \$1,627,899 serves Early Head Start pregnant women, infants, and toddlers (116). The grant application must be submitted via the Head Start Enterprise System by January 1, 2024. Ms. Jacobs made a motion to approve submitting the 5-Year Project Period Grant application. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. DeSpain next sought Board approval to submit a request to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for a waiver of non-federal funds for \$1,158,883 (71%) of the required match for the Head Start Program for the funding period April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025. This waiver request would be included in the grant application and is due before January 1, 2024. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the submission of a non-federal waiver of \$1,158,883. Mr. Preston seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, Ms. DeSpain sought Board approval to submit a request to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for a waiver of non-federal funds for \$299,520 (74%) of the required match for the Early Head Start Program for the funding period April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025. This waiver request would be included in the grant application and is due before January 1, 2024. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the submission of a non-federal waiver of \$299,520. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided a copy of the October 2023 Board Report, October 2023 Policy Council minutes, ACF-PI-OHS-23-04, the enrollment status report, and a register of vacant positions. Please encourage interested candidates to visit the Agency website at [www.tcohelps.org](http://www.tcohelps.org) or call 1-800-323-5434. In conclusion, she reminded Board members to fill out the In-Kind/Volunteer sheet for any time spent reading over materials previously handed out.

**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): Tammy Saenz**

The LIHEAP department is still going strong every day. They have entered 4,503 applications in the last two months. The number of emergency applications has been high this year, demonstrating the need

for assistance. The LIHEAP staff have been coming in an hour early to take advantage of the quiet time to verify and process applications. The PIPP department, while also busy with PIPP re-certifications, has jumped in to help with LIHEAP when able. Ms. Saenz encouraged members to have anyone having difficulty reaching an office to get an appointment to call the main office.

**Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson**

Mr. Thompson reported that the Weatherization Department has finalized the cost for the 2024 Weatherization catalogs and has them distributed to the contractors. There have been a few issues with contractors getting used to the new cost and billing procedures, but they are working through them.

The program has completed and submitted the 2024 Monitoring Tool required by DCEO. Following DCEO review, they requested one additional document. Mr. Thompson submitted the document immediately, and they await final approval.

They also finalized and submitted the Reconciliation/Closeout Packages for the 2023 HHS and State of Illinois budgets. They are awaiting confirmation that they have been accepted.

They have begun rolling out the more comprehensive program component, Weatherization Plus, and Weatherization Ready funds. These additions to the program allow repairs to homes that would otherwise be deferred or denied due to roof leaks, plumbing or electrical issues, etc. They have a couple of houses already assessed to receive some of these comprehensive upgrades.

All ten desk audits have been submitted and approved by DCEO (Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity), but they are awaiting the formal approval letter. They can now begin concentrating on program production and getting homes completed.

**President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins**

The Board remains with one vacancy, LaSalle County, Category C. Ms. Calkins requested and received approval for a 90-day extension to fill this vacancy. She reminded members that she has informational handouts that can be shared if they know anyone interested.

Ms. Calkins explained to members that they have made some progress on strategic goals, but it has been minimal. Currently, they are reviewing goal activities and providing updates at monthly Management meetings. They have decided they could make better progress if they separate this from the monthly meetings and instead develop small committees to work toward each goal. The plan is to have this new structure in place in January 2024.

Each year, the Agency reviews the Conflict of Interest Policy with the Board and key Agency staff, who have the authority to purchase or approve purchases. The Board packets included the Conflict of Interest Policy, a sign-off form, and a current vendor list. Members were asked to review the policy and the vendor list and complete the sign-off document. If there is a perceived or known conflict of interest, members should note that on the form. If a member is unaware of any conflicts of interest, they can simply write, "none." Members were asked to return the completed sign-off sheet to Ms. Calkins.

Also included in tonight's Board packets is a document that encompasses the history of TCOC from its inception through 2023. This is just for member review and will be provided to new members and employees to share a bit about our history.

And finally, included in tonight's packet is the current committee roster. Ms. Calkins asked members to review the list. Members should draw a line through their names if they are listed on a committee they no longer wish to be on. If they want to join a committee they are not currently on, they can write their name in the committee box. She expressed the need for additional membership in specific committees. If any changes are made, the document must be returned to Ms. Calkins, or members can contact her via email or phone to discuss changes.

Ms. Calkins thanked the Personnel Committee, which met four times in November to review new policies, address changes needed to the Human Resource Policy and Procedures Manual, complete the President/CEO appraisal, and review health Insurance information. They will meet again in January to review and approve a new Salary/Wage Classification by Position scale for 2024.

As Congress works through appropriation bills, they expect the House Labor-HHS appropriations bill (which contains CSBG, Head Start, and LIHEAP) to be on the Floor soon. The House Labor-HHS bill is set at FY2022 levels for an overall cut of \$61 billion. There are at least five amendments regarding Head Start. At least 1 seeks decreased funding, 4 would increase funding, and 1 restricts funds from being used to implement mask mandates. So far, there is one amendment involving LIHEAP, and it would increase LIHEAP funding by \$1.6 billion. There are no amendments regarding CSBG except that the House Labor-HHS bill does not provide for 200% of FPL eligibility in CSBG. Fortunately, the Senate's version does.

**Old Business:**

There was no old business at this time.

**New Business:**

Full board training, facilitated by the Illinois Association for Community Action Agencies (IACAA), will take the place of the January meeting. Ms. Calkins encouraged members to join in person if able.

**Next Meeting:**

The next Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, January 23, 2024, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:39 p.m.