

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**BOARD OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES**  
**August 5, 2024**

The regular meeting of the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) was held August 5, 2024 at Conway Human Development Center. The meeting convened at 10:36 a.m. pursuant to the call of the Board Chair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Suzann McCommon, David Rosegrant, Michelle Loe, and Randy Lavery.

STAFF PRESENT: Medicaid Specialty Populations Director Melissa Weatherton, DDS Director Jennifer Brezée, DDS Deputy Director Thomas Tarpley, Lena Bethell, Jeff Gonyea, Sarah Murphy, Kerry Gambill, Ronald Baker, Mark Wargo, Julie Howard, Avis Lane, Tammy Benbrook, Amanda Cox, and Raven Fuller.

OTHERS PRESENT: Deborah Rainwater, Kris Stewart and MacKenzie Bell of Disability Rights Arkansas, Kimberly Dodd, Attorney General Representative Michael Bynum, Troy Clark, and Katrina Robertson.

Ms. McCommon called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance.

Ms. McCommon called for a motion to approve the minutes from the May 1, 2024 regular meeting of the DDS Board. Mr. Rosegrant made a motion that the minutes be approved. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The Physical Management Subcommittee met at 10:00 on this date to discuss the extension of lease N9182 (attachment 1) involving 96.5 acres of pastureland on Conway Human Development Center property. The Subcommittee moved to approve the extension for two years. Mr. Rosegrant seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The Superintendents of the human development centers shared items of interest regarding campus activities, hiring efforts, and construction updates. Conway HDC Superintendent Sarah Murphy reported the employee appreciation family fun day was recently held in addition to the quarterly We Heart celebration. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Beyond the Borders conference is scheduled for August 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> and to date 450 participants are registered. Jonesboro HDC Assistant Superintendent Ronald Baker highlighted client water day, the second We Heart celebration, the summer formal, and the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration scheduled for October. He also advised construction on the medical building complex is scheduled to begin in February. Booneville HDC Superintendent Jeff Gonyea advised the Employee Relations Committee has been actively engaged in employee recognitions. He also provided an overview of the July 4<sup>th</sup> parade and 8<sup>th</sup> annual golf tournament which raised funds to benefit Special Olympics. Judge Hill will receive a new chiller and construction of the new sewer line will begin in the Fall. Arkadelphia HDC Superintendent Kerry Gambill provided information regarding the clients' participation in the Clark County Farmer's Market and the campus bar-b-que to celebrate July 4<sup>th</sup>. The center's second We Heart

activity was also held. Southeast Arkansas HDC Superintendent Mark Wargo shared that clients have participated in many activities including Water Week and the 68<sup>th</sup> Annual Pink Tomato Festival. Several clients have enrolled in the Game and Fish Commission's fishing program and the annual Elks picnic is scheduled for September. The center has received the certificate of occupancy for 19 Hickory and expansion has begun on 18 Hickory.

Stephens Investment Manager Troy Clark provided an overview of the Board's investment account consisting of cash and CDs. He outlined the approximate income generated per year and noted that he anticipates a drop in interest rates soon. The Board discussed a plan to purchase another CD and a total balance that will remain in the account. Mr. Clark also advised Hank Phiefer would be replacing him as the new investment consultant.

Ms. Brezée thanked staff and superintendents for their support during the first nine weeks of her tenure. Proceeds from the June Farmers Market totaling over \$1200.00 will be used for the HDC gift fund. The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Food and Craft Fair will be held on October 4<sup>th</sup>. The Blue Umbrella has been participating in Friday night art walks downtown. Ms. Brezée is scheduled to present at the upcoming Beyond The Borders conference. She also provided updates on HDC camera installation. Booneville and Warren have the network infrastructure and upgrade complete. Fiber installation is underway at Conway. Cameras are in place at Arkadelphia and Jonesboro, but they are not yet on the DHS network.

Mr. Tarpley provided the Board with an update on the Booneville HDC revitalization project proposal by Liquid Love Ministries. The group would like to upgrade the rodeo grounds to provide equine therapy and trail rides to at risk youth and other community organizations. Per the Board's request Mr. Gonyea reached out for additional information regarding liability and potential benefits for BHDC clients. To date they have not responded.

Arkansas Rural Connect has asked to lay the broadband fiber infrastructure, at no cost, at Booneville HDC as they won the bid on the state broadband contract. The Board's concerns regarding potential property damage and/or utilities disruption were voiced to them and they are agreeable to cover damages. Mr. Tarpley advised their attorneys are preparing a contract for DHS attorneys to review.

Mr. Tarpley updated the Board with information regarding funds from timber and mineral rights proceeds being transferred to an interest-bearing account. OCC was unable to obtain information to clarify if the funds could be invested and suggested Attorney General Representative Michael Bynum may be able to research it further. He requested that the Board consider the transfer of current timber and mineral rights funds into the construction account to be used for the Booneville HDC 4, 8-bed construction project. Ms. Loe made the motion to move the funds needed for the completion on the project. Mr. Rosegrant seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Mr. Tarpley introduced Lena Bethell as the new DDS CFO. He also announced Dale Woodall's retirement and introduced Victor Eackles as his replacement.

Ms. Brezée advised an account is currently being established to manage funds donated to the HDC We Heart initiative. A meeting with the Board to further discuss funding for SWAG items being considered for this initiative will be scheduled.


Conway HDC parent Deborah Rainwater thanked the Board and staff for their work and welcomed Ms. Brezée. She also announced that the Conway Chamber of Commerce named CHDC Superintendent Sarah Murphy as Administrator of the Year.

Arkadelphia HDC parent and secretary for Families and Friends of Care Facility Residents Kimberly Dodd advised FFCFR will donate \$2000.00 to the We Heart initiative. Arkadelphia HDC Superintendent Kerry Gambill provided an overview of the initiative and steps being taken to measure the effectiveness of the program.

Ms. Weatherton addressed Ms. Dodd's inquiry regarding the nursing shortage with information that a proposal is tentatively scheduled to run at the Legislature the week of August 19<sup>th</sup>.

With no further business, Ms. McCommon called for a motion for the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Lavery made a motion that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Rosegrant seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

ATTEST:

  
Suzann McCommon  
Chair, Board of DDS

  
Executive Secretary