

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – August 15, 2022**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, August 15, 2022, at 11:31 a.m., in the Commissioner's Board Room, 69 N Main St., Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

Tony Brown, Chairman; David N. Walker (arrived at 11:36 a.m.), Vice-Chair; Brenda Vaughn; Chris Allison; Patrick Ellis

**Members Absent**

None

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Victoria Craig, Clerk to the Board.

**Call to Order**

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:31 a.m.

**VAYA Health Update**

Dustin Burleson presented Vaya Health Updates to the Board. There is a need for more behavioral support personnel as well as the healthcare professionals that provide services for Vaya. There has been an expansion of the new health plan and with that comes more of a need for additional staff. Due to this, there is a waitlist across the system. One of the ways that Vaya is trying to work through staffing issues is by increasing the outpatient rate for crisis walk-in centers (RHA in McDowell). Having higher rates allows Vaya to obtain additional funding to recruit and retain staff.

The following are strategies that Vaya has used to address the workforce challenges:

- Increased rates across all service areas to promote competitive recruitment and retention
- Targeted rate increases for Direct Support Professionals for more competitive pay for key community-based behavioral health and intellectual/development services
- Targeted work and funding with providers to develop strategies for recruitment and retention
- Utilizing funding to allow providers to incentive staffing in more rural counties
- Focused work with Vaya Provider Advisory Council to develop recruitment and retention strategies across service and disability

Vaya, along with the LME/MCOs, has put together an improvement initiative to address challenges from multiple DSS locations.

- Vaya is working with all LME/MCOs to establish a standardized seamless transition of care for children placed outside of the Vaya Health Plan region
- Vaya is implementing a standardized pass-through authorization process for children entering residential treatment services to eliminate any barriers for children needing to enter residential treatment quickly
- Vaya is working with other LME/MCOs and Benchmarks to develop a standardized referral process for all residential providers
- Vaya continues to expand a statewide open network to improve access to care for child services
- Reduce or eliminate the need for Out of Network Agreements prior to entry to care
- Vaya continues to support DSS' by co-locating their Care Management with DSS for clinical and system support – for McDowell County specifically that person is Kim Smith.
- Vaya has an escalation protocol for DSS' to notify Vaya leadership of acute high-risk cases including 24/7 access through the Vaya Call Center outside business hours
- Vaya is raising rates to expand access to crisis/emergency beds to reduce/eliminate the need for DSS to temporarily house children with an emergency need
  - Vaya currently has 38 crisis beds that are available for Vaya members
  - Vaya is actively working to add 20 additional crisis beds over the next 3 months (pending DHSR approval)

Vaya is expanding access to Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) by increasing the TFC rate from \$97.22 to \$175.00 per day, with Emergency Respite being \$360.00 per day. The goal is to create a network that allows local children to stay local in their home communities. In the coming weeks, Vaya will be reaching out to contracted TFC providers to discuss the monitoring of the success of these new rates.

Vaya is a part of a task force that will be looking into two options of how to recommend spending the Opioid Settlement Funds and present them to the Board of Commissioners after further research. An option that the task force is currently considering to recommend is a high-impact opioid abatement strategy. This strategy involves items such as Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) which has been found to be very effective. An example of that would be Narcan, which the County currently uses.

### **DSS Update**

The County Manager, who is acting DSS Director, informed the Board that he did not meet with DSS last week due to attending an out-of-town conference. Mr. Wooten and Anna Lee, HR Director, meet with DSS on Thursday mornings for about an hour and a half to get department updates. Mr. Wooten has continuous communication with the Department throughout the week as well, particularly with Cindy Reel (Administrative Team Lead) and Ray Burleson (Adult Services Supervisor). The Director will sign off on medical treatment for adults and children, so it's imperative there is an open line of communication with all parties involved.

There is an ongoing investigation involving an incident where a woman was found outside of Cedarbrook Apartments who had been assaulted.

DSS staff has 6 vacancies in Child Welfare.

Vice-Chairman Walker asked Mr. Wooten why some of the areas on the DSS report weren't listed. Mr. Wooten provided clarity that this report does have a lag, so some of the information may come a little later.

The County Manager mentioned that there wasn't any funding to help with a facility need study for DSS and asked the Board if this was something they would like to do internally. Commissioner Ellis stated that he would prioritize County funds to go towards items such as DSS facility improvements before the improvements on the animal shelter. He also asked if the animal shelter could be privatized. Mr. Wooten informed him that the County doesn't have a strong, centralized animal welfare organization to do that at this time.

### **Financing Reimbursement Resolutions**

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve as presented, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

### **SRO Position at Foothills Community School**

FCS is the only school in McDowell County that doesn't have an SRO. FCS is within city limits, which typically means a city police officer would be the SRO. Mr. Wooten informed the Board that through conversation with the school system, the City wanted to decrease its funding allotment. Sheriff Buchanan informed staff that he would agree to place a deputy at the school.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approach the City of Marion and request matched funding with the County to pay for the SRO position, second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

### **Adjourn**

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:04 p.m., second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Attest:

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Victoria Craig  
Clerk to the Board

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Tony G. Brown  
Chairman