

**Human Services Levy Review Committee Meeting Minutes for  
Franklin County Children Services  
March 7, 2024**

**CALL TO ORDER—CHAIR**

The Human Services Levy Review Committee (HSLRC) meeting was called to order by Jerry Friedman on Thursday, March 7, 2024, at 11:00 A.M.

**ROLL CALL**

- HSLRC members present: Jerry Friedman; Michael Curtin; Nana Watson; Rose Handon, Ph.D.; and Zachary Talarek, Director, Office of Management and Budget.
- HSLRC members absent: Jesse Hemphill; Jim Bowman
- Clerk’s Office: Lauren M. Graessle, Deputy Clerk to the Board of Commissioners & Assistant Director of Community Appointments.
- Commissioner Kevin L. Boyce’s office: Emily Cooner, Policy Manager.
- County Administration: Kenneth N. Wilson, County Administrator; Joy Bivens, Deputy County Administrator.
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB): Rachel Buske, Budget Analyst 3; and Madeline Gresham, Budget Analyst 2.
- Franklin County Children Services: Chip Spinning, Executive Director; Dan Shook, CFO; Ellen Clapp, Director of Financial Management; Katie Congrove, Chief Legal Counsel; Emily Green, Family Services Director-Intake, Ongoing & Placement Services; Vanessa Lichtensteiger, Administrative Assistant to the CFO; Tanya McClanahan, Director of Inclusion & Analysis; Raquel Breckenridge, Family Services Director-Permanency; Tina Rutherford, Deputy Director; Scott Varner, Director of Communications & Community Outreach.

**ELECTION OF HSLRC CHAIRPERSON**

Mr. Friedman stated that the first order of business was to nominate a HSLRC chairperson. Mr. Curtin nominated Mr. Friedman, seconded by Dr. Handon. Mr. Curtin moved to close the nominations. All members voted “Aye,” and the motion carried. Mr. Friedman asked for a vote to approve his nomination to HSLRC chairperson. All members voted “Aye,” and the motion carried.

## **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

Mr. Friedman stated that the next item on the agenda was the approval of the May 26, 2022, meeting minutes. Hearing no edits or comments, Mr. Talarek moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Dr. Handon. All members voted “Aye,” and the motion carried.

Mr. Friedman noted that the second set of minutes for approval were the September 20, 2023, meeting minutes. Pending a change in title to reflect “Board of Developmental Disabilities,” Mr. Talarek moved to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Mr. Curtin. All members voted “Aye,” and the motion carried.

## **2024 LEVY PROPOSAL PRESENTATION—FCCS**

Mr. Spinning began the FCCS 2024 levy proposal presentation. He noted that the FCCS Board’s recommendation is to place a 1.9 mill renewal levy, with a 1.2 mill increase for a 10-year period on the November 5, 2024, general election ballot. Mr. Spinning noted that FCCS has not asked voters for a millage increase in over twenty years. He stated that without the increased support, FCCS would be forced to cut existing services, starting as early as 2026. Each year, FCCS is relied on to help more than 26,000 children and families by offering services and support to keep children and families together. Mr. Spinning stated that FCCS must evolve how it protects children and families. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had dramatic impacts, and it is no longer sustainable to continue to do what has always been done. Mr. Spinning also stated that FCCS has collected better data to determine ways to keep children safer.

Mr. Varner provided an overview of the FCCS Call to Action, which included the following six strategic priorities: Protecting the Whole Child, Strengthening All Families, Valuing the Team FCCS Culture, Managing Financial Resources Responsibly, Engaging Our Community Authentically, and Leading in Innovation. Mr. Varner detailed how these action priorities were determined and discussed each of them individually. He stated that FCCS is part of the social service safety net that is designed to keep children safe and families together, and it values partnership and close collaboration with a number of agencies within Franklin County and the City of Columbus. Mr. Varner added that FCCS is a partner in advancing the Rise Together Blueprint for Reducing Poverty in Franklin County, noting that many of the services FCCS offers align with the essential themes identified in the Blueprint.

Mr. Varner shared a map of Franklin County showing that essentially every part of the county is served by FCCS. FCCS served 26,408 children and received 27,955 referrals in 2023. Also in 2023, 11,642 referrals were screened, and 1,517 referrals were transferred to ongoing case management services. Mr. Varner provided a breakdown of the types of referrals that were screened in 2023 and noted that 89% were reports of child abuse and neglect. He added that the number of referrals FCCS has received each year over the past several years has stayed consistent. Mr. Varner explained the FCCS Case Flow Diagram to illustrate the various paths cases can take once a referral is received. He noted that for the first time, there has been a change in state law

that will allow FCCS to reach out to some of the families that had originally been screened out but would benefit from services and support.

Mr. Varner stated that when youth come into the custody of FCCS, the priority is to place them in a family-like setting. In 2023, 1,472 children were placed in foster care, 1,205 children were placed in kinship relative/non-relative care, and 548 children were placed in group or institutional care. Mr. Varner noted that since the pandemic in 2020, there has been a dip in the number of youth being placed, which mirrors national trends. He stated that this suggests FCCS has been able to help more families so that the courts and law enforcement do not have to take the drastic step of placing children in the custody of FCCS as often.

Although the population of cases has decreased, the complexity of cases is increasing. He noted that the length of stay for those children in FCCS custody is increasing, and those children spend an average of 580 days in FCCS custody. That is a 60% increase from a decade ago. Mr. Varner explained the growth in complexity and the increase in length of stay by noting that one in four youth in the custody of a public child service agency has complex issues, including mental illness, developmental disabilities, and/or multi-system experiences. He noted that complexity comes with a cost, and it has driven up the per diem cost of placement by 24% over the last three years. Mr. Varner explained that if there was ever a return to the number of placements seen pre-pandemic, the increased per diems would have a devastating impact on the financial stability of FCCS based on the current levy funding. He added that Franklin County was very fortunate to receive federal pandemic relief funds, but most of those programs have ended or are ending soon. He explained that this will send many families back on a pathway to poverty, which increases the likelihood that children will enter the child welfare system.

Mr. Shook provided an overview of the three main initiatives in which FCCS would like to invest to face the challenges ahead. With the additional levy funds, FCCS would focus on Kinship Support Parity, Staff Recruitment and Retainment, Community Prevention Services, and Whole Child Mental Health Supports. Mr. Shook explained the Kinship Support Parity initiative, proposing investments in higher monthly stipends, support for kinship families such as housing/rental assistance, utilities, childcare, and food, the amplification of the Kinship Permanency Stipend Program, and boosting FCCS's partnership with the Franklin County Office on Aging to provide support for seniors caring for kin. He stated that since beginning monthly stipends for kinship families in 2021, FCCS has paid over \$4.5 million in monthly stipends to kin relatives caring for placed youth. Additionally, since 2021, FCCS has provided over \$3.8 million in housing support, which includes utilities, \$2.2 million in childcare, and \$600,000 in other needed expenses such as clothing and food.

Mr. Shook noted that over the past three years, these dollars have been funded through the state with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars. He explained that FCCS received approximately \$1-1.5 million per year in TANF funds for the families it supports, but in the current budget, the state has cut that funding completely. Mr. Shook stated that the proposed increase to the levy would be used to continue to provide those services that were previously funded through TANF. He then explained the Kinship Permanency Stipend Program, which is for kinship relatives who take legal custody of placed youth. Generally, the support from the county ends at

this time, but through the Kinship Permanency Stipend Program, the support would continue until the child turns 18 or until the family no longer has legal custody. Mr. Shook noted that FCCS would like to set aside \$1,500 per year in financial support for emergencies for those families who take legal custody of the children. Mr. Shook explained that FCCS would like to expand the number of kinship caregivers over the next ten years.

Given the data and projections, Mr. Shook estimated that this program could be expanded to serve 1,100 children. Mr. Shook stated that FCCS has a MOU with the Office on Aging, which is currently \$300,000 per year, and FCCS would like to double that amount to \$600,000 per year. Mr. Shook explained that investing in kinship families is crucial because children who exit FCCS custody are less likely than any other alternative placement to return to FCCS.

Mr. Shook detailed the second initiative, Staff Recruitment and Retainment. He noted that the staff are critical in the work of FCCS and recruiting and retention have been difficult. He stated that FCCS is well under market in terms of competitiveness. FCCS would like to continue its investment in its workforce to attract and retain qualified employees who better reflect the community it serves. Mr. Shook added that the investment in staff includes cost-of-living increases, as well as annual steps/retention adjustments. He explained that staff retention is critical because national data shows that children whose caseworkers leave and have new caseworkers assigned are likely to be in child welfare custody for six months longer, on average. Mr. Shook stated that after federal reimbursement, the average cost per month per child who stays in custody is approximately \$4,000.

Mr. Shook detailed the final initiative, which includes Community Prevention Services and Whole Child Mental Health Supports. He explained that in 2021, FCCS completed an RFP to increase their number of community prevention service providers from 8 to 16. He noted that these 16 facilities have additional capacity, so additional funding would allow FCCS to provide them additional support. FCCS would like to invest approximately \$11 million over the ten-year period in this initiative, and \$2.5 million of that would be set aside to advance youth mental health services and support. Mr. Shook summarized investments FCCS would like to make to face the challenges ahead, including serving screened-out families and working with managed care providers to keep costs low, with only a 3% increase for each year of the levy. Mr. Shook stated that if FCCS can invest in the initiatives he outlined, the number of children in FCCS should remain low. He noted that the reimbursement for higher placement-day costs has decreased from 30% to 8%, equating a loss of \$2.5 million in revenue for children placed in congregate care settings. He emphasized the need to prioritize family-like placements.

Mr. Shook repeated the FCCS levy proposal and stated that it would cost a homeowner an annual amount of \$70.17 per \$100,000 property value after rollback. He translated that to an increase from the current property tax to approximately \$3.50 per month. He noted that with the 1.2 mill add-on, FCCS is projected to have stable funding through 2035 and would only need to ask for a renewal in five years. He also explained that a levy ask under the 1.2 mill add-on would result in FCCS scaling back initiatives or cutting back on services as early as 2026-2027 or coming back to ask voters for another increase in 2029. Mr. Shook presented a chart detailing FCCS's Historical Revenue and Expenditures from 2019-2023, including projections for 2024. Mr. Shook provided

an overview of the 2024 Budgeted Revenue, stating that FCCS maximizes any federal and state funding it receives, but it relies most heavily on the levy dollars. Over 70% of the 2024 Budget is supported by the levy dollars. Mr. Shook noted that FCCS expects a 1% increase in its budget each year for new construction.

Mr. Spinning offered some additional perspective regarding the history of support for children in our community. He explained that a community survey shows that protecting children is a high priority for 80% of respondents. He stated that county voters have passed FCCS property tax levies since 1958, with only one rejection in the 1980s.

Mr. Spinning emphasized that FCCS is one of the most fiscally prudent public agencies in Central Ohio and has not asked voters for a millage increase in over 20 years. FCCS believes this levy proposal is a reasonable and necessary ask because no mission is more important than protecting children and strengthening families.

### **Q&A—HSLRC AND FCCS STAFF**

Mr. Friedman opened the meeting to questions.

Mr. Curtin noted that upon his review of the materials, he calculated that nearly 90% of FCCS expenditures are in two areas: staff costs and placement/ managed Board & Care. He noted that most dollars will go to the Kinship Support Parity initiative and the Staff Recruitment and Retainment initiative. Mr. Curtin acknowledged that FCCS provided aggregate numbers for those two categories, but he asked for more specific data. He asked, for example, for the median monthly stipend that is paid out now, and what that median is projected to be with the proposed increase. He asked what median placement costs are now versus what they will have to be to remain successful. He asked for similar information regarding Staff Recruitment and Retainment, including median salaries and the terms of the collective bargaining agreement. Mr. Shook stated that FCCS would compile that data regarding Staff Recruitment and Retainment and report back to the HSLRC.

Mr. Shook stated that for the Kinship Support Parity initiative, FCCS would like to expand the Permanency Program. He stated that FCCS is projecting \$58 million over the ten-year period in expanded dollars toward this program. Mr. Shook noted that currently, FCCS pays the same amount as the Ohio Works First (OWF) Child-Only Benefit, which he estimated is approximately \$380 per month. He explained that instead of matching that amount, FCCS would like to start payments at \$500 per month. He stated that when that \$500 per month is combined with the OWF Child-Only Benefit, the total is very close to the average amount that FCCS pays a foster parent for a traditional child. Mr. Shook noted that in this proposal, payments would begin at \$500 per month and would increase by 3% each year. He reiterated that FCCS would also set aside \$1500 for families each year for emergency assistance. This is all included in the Kinship Permanency Program. Mr. Shook noted that the other kinship dollars that were discussed were mostly TANF dollars, and FCCS was spending approximately \$1.5-2 million of those funds for children in their custody. He explained that there was still a need for dollars beyond those TANF funds, so FCCS

identified additional levy dollars that could be set aside for that cause. He reiterated that FCCS no longer has TANF dollars, and it is struggling to support that program without those funds. With additional dollars from the levy increase, FCCS would like to allocate approximately \$2 million to support those families.

Mr. Shook stated that FCCS began the second year of its collective bargaining agreement in February 2024, and it ends in February 2026. He noted that FCCS will work with the union well before that to review all collective bargaining topics and issues. Mr. Curtin stated that he was struck when he heard that a large percentage of caseworkers are lost within the first two years of their employment, so he would like to know the average and median salaries for FCCS employees in addition to any other retainment data.

Ms. Watson asked for a breakdown of the children in FCCS custody by gender and race. Mr. Shook stated that he would locate that data to share. Ms. Watson asked if the FCCS staff reflects the population that FCCS serves. Mr. Spinning stated that FCCS would compile that data and follow up with the HSLRC. Ms. Watson asked if FCCS engages with other agencies that provide assistance when they offer their assistance through the kinship programs. Mr. Shook stated that FCCS does engage with those agencies. Ms. Breckenridge explained that FCCS has an in-house kinship JFS worker who provides all kinship caregivers access to JFS benefits at the onset of each case. She explained that FCCS looks for resources within the community first before offering any type of monetary assistance outside of the stipend. Ms. Watson asked if FCCS verifies the income of the individuals in these programs, to which Ms. Breckenridge replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Watson noted that there have been some high-profile instances with children in the care of FCCS and in placed care, the most recent of which was the death of a child in kinship care. She asked how FCCS will address these instances, how it will share with the community how these instances occurred, and what measures FCCS can put in place to ensure these instances do not happen again. She provided another example of a child in the foster care system who was killed by police. Mr. Spinning acknowledged that those have been dark times for FCCS, and the agency is continuously trying to learn and evolve so it can prevent those outcomes. He stated that the National Partnership on Child Safety has nearly 39 jurisdictions now that represent 70% of all children in child welfare. He continued that in order to learn from the terrible situations that have occurred, such as the two that Ms. Watson mentioned, FCCS needs additional outside data to learn from. Mr. Spinning explained that he does not have an exact answer to Ms. Watson's now, but he stated that there are national tools and standards in place to define all the situations faced in child welfare. He stated that there are measures in place to ensure that FCCS is using the same assessments as those that are used nationally to look at entire systems, not just child welfare. Mr. Spinning stated that by evaluating instances such as fatalities with national educational partners, FCCS can look at larger groups of national data to see what they can learn from similar situations, and then what measures they can put in place to prevent them in the future.

Ms. Watson asked Mr. Varner if FCCS uses minority vendors when it engages with the community and, if so, how much of the budget is allocated to that cause. Mr. Varner confirmed that FCCS is working with a diverse number of businesses and ensuring that minority businesses are included. He stated that he would provide exact numbers to the HSLRC. Mr. Shook added that FCCS has

made an intentional effort to work with minority businesses, and recently amended its RFP process to do so.

Mr. Shook followed up on Ms. Watson's first question regarding the demographics of the children in FCCS custody. He stated that currently, there are nearly 1,600 children in FCCS custody, and 51% are male and 49% are female. He added that 42% of the children are Black, 30% are White, 17% are multiracial, 10% are Hispanic, 1% is Asian, and a small portion of the children are of unknown race. Ms. Watson asked for FCCS employee demographics to see if children in their care can engage with someone who looks like them. She stated that she had further questions that she would send to FCCS. Mr. Spinning and Mr. Shook agreed to answer any questions she had.

Mr. Friedman noted that there would be further opportunities to ask questions, and OMB would schedule a time for FCCS to return and answer those questions. Mr. Curtin followed up on Ms. Watson's question regarding the racial makeup of the FCCS staff to ask if there are any federal or state legal constraints that provide hurdles that need to be surmounted to achieve the ratios they would like to have.

Mr. Friedman noted that the FCCS presentation focused on innovation, but he asked if it had identified things that do not work and if there is a list of things FCCS plans on stopping because of the lack of return on investment. Mr. Spinning replied that the system is very heavy-handed, and that is why it is hard to get children out of FCCS custody once they enter it. He stated that FCCS needs to figure out a way to find safe alternative care for children before FCCS is required to file for custody of them. He explained that it is so significant to have that extra time so that children are not separated from everyone they know, including their teachers. He added that FCCS needs to change how it prepares children to leave its system so that they are in a far better position to be successful. Mr. Spinning noted that, in many ways, FCCS is a safety net for many other systems. He stated that FCCS needs to figure out how to serve individuals from other systems without bringing them into its system.

Mr. Friedman asked how many caseworkers a child ends up having when FCCS is working with other agencies in the greater ecosystem. He asked if there was a method for assigning who has primary responsibility for coordination. Ms. Breckenridge explained that when a case opens, the FCCS caseworker is the primary case manager for that family. She stated that they are responsible for the totality of the case. She added that FCCS is a large agency, so it has other supports, such as adoption workers and kinship workers, who can help the primary caseworker to stabilize families.

Mr. Friedman asked about children who are involved in multiple systems, to which Ms. Breckenridge replied that FCCS is generally still the custodial agency in those cases and is responsible for case management, but they work in tandem with the other agencies and providers. Mr. Friedman asked if any of the youth experience issues with gender dysphoria and if the recent activity by the general assembly has complicated that. Ms. Breckenridge replied that FCCS has seen an increase in that population of youth, and a lot of those youth end up in long-term custody statuses. She stated that FCCS is piloting programs to help those youth, and it has seen an increase in adoptive families and foster care providers who are interested in serving those youth.

Mr. Friedman stated that the remaining questions from the HSLRC would be compiled and sent to FCCS for review and responses.

**HSLRC MEETING SCHEDULE—APPROVAL OF TIMELINE—OMB**

Ms. Buske provided an overview of the timeline for the FCCS Levy Review. Mr. Talarek moved to approve, seconded by Dr. Handon. All members voted “Aye,” and the motion carried.

**CLOSING REMARKS—CHAIR**

Mr. Friedman had no closing remarks.

With no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 12:47 P.M.

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These minutes are a general summary of the Human Services Levy Review Committee meeting on Thursday, March 7, 2024.

Submitted by:

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Lauren M. Graessle,  
Deputy Clerk to the Board of Commissioners &  
Assistant Director of Community Appointments