

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona**

Board Members Present: Donna Gority, Susanna Tomlinson, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Chris Cohn, Mike Stubler, Jane Petroski, Bonita Shreve and Ken Dean

Board Members Absent: Rhonda Cadle, Susan Franco, Jeff Colbert, Jen Drass, Steve Martynuska and Commissioner Burke

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Erin Kay, Cindy James, Missy Gillin, Aimee Burns, Jamie Henry, Kelly Popich, Lorrie Hetager, Maria Brandt and Jennifer Kensinger

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- Donna Gority called the meeting to order and self-introductions were made. Bonita Shreve, newest board member, was in attendance.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of the December 4, 2025 Meeting Minutes

- **Motion made by Mike Stubler to accept the December 4, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Ken Dean seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.**

4. Board Operations – Tricia Johnson, Director, Department of Social Services (DSS)

- Tricia reported that the \$170 monetary donation that was collected at the December meeting was equally distributed to the H.O.P.E. Drop In Center and the Warming Center.
- The Warming Center will be open until March 2, 2026.

Leadership Coalition Update

- The Leadership Coalition will be having their annual Legislative Breakfast on Friday, March 6, 2026 at Blair HealthChoices. All current representatives will be in attendance or have someone from their office attend. Topic: System Coordination and its Impacts on Divisionary Efforts. Members of the Leadership Coalition will coordinate to meet with Criminal Justice (Courts) at another time. Cindy and Nikki do attend the Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) meeting. The folks running for legislative positions will not be in attendance. Trish will meet with them after they are elected.
- Social Services Income & Expense (I&E) report and Retained Funds plan have been tentatively approved by the State. Once the State receives all necessary documentation, those items will be approved.
- Since DSS was flat-funded all 2025/2026 contracts will remain the same.

Nominate/Elect or Retain Advisory Board Chairperson, Vice Chairperson

- Donna Gority, current Chair, and Susanna Tomlinson, current Vice Chair, agreed to maintain their positions on the Board for another year.
- **Motion made by Chris Cohn to retain Donna Gority, Chairperson, and Susanna Tomlinson, Vice Chairperson, through 2026. Kyle Siskron-Leonard seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.**
- Sue Franco agreed to retain her position as Secretary at the December 2025 meeting.
- The Board will nominate new officials in the Fall.

5. Mental Health Committee Report

- Kyle reported that the meeting was held at the H.O.P.E Drop-In. A tour of the facility was given after the meeting.
- The MH Committee will continue to have presenters at future meetings. A representative from Western Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies (WBHA) will present at the March meeting.
- A MH funding chart was included in the agenda packet to show how DSS funding is allocated to different providers for their services.

6. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- No January meeting was held.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that funds are flowing.
- County no longer has a hiring or spending freeze.
- Tricia has scheduled three interviews for DSS's open fiscal specialist position. Five qualified candidates made the Civil Service list.
- Tricia stated that Trina Illig's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is experiencing a statewide glitch.
- Tricia listened to Governor Shapiro's budget address, and it appears that MH will remain flat-funded.

Mental Health – Cindy James

- Cindy reported that since the MH budget was flat-funded that DSS will not be adding a third mental health program specialist position.
- A few events have already been scheduled for May is Mental Health Month. The MH event held at the Altoona Curve baseball game will be May 21, 2026. Again, this year, county school district students will be given the opportunity to create a t-shirt design for that night. The winner of that contest will have their design featured on a t-shirt that will be sold at the event.
- Also, for May is Mental Health Month, Cindy will be working with providers to offer more trainings during May.

Intellectual Disabilities – Jamie Henry

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Jamie stated that Blair County is still struggling with the lack of residential providers. The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), oversight entity, is putting a lot of constraints on providers, so SASMG is talking with providers that are already established to try to bring them in.
- Also still moving toward Performance Based Contracting which is tier based for providers. The goal is to elevate the quality of services.
- Jamie announced that Melissa Gordon is no longer with SASMG. Jamie has taken over those duties. Currently, there are no plans to fill her vacated position.

Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that due to a calculation error that EI's 24/25 program determination results are not available. The error looks to be in EI's favor.
- There was an approved rate increase for all EI's rates for 25/26. That increase will be retroactive to July 1, 2025.
- The Week of the Young Child Event is scheduled for April 11, 2026 and will be held at Logan Valley Mall from 11 AM to 2 PM.
- The annual EI Family Survey is currently open until the end of May 2026. This survey is for families who receive EI services.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy stated that the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) and Human Services Development Fund (HSDF) funds have remained the same. Some providers will receive additional funding through the retained funds plan.
- Missy reported that safe and affordable housing remains to be an issue throughout the county. The City of Altoona has a robust demolition plan for blight and has seventy (70) properties that will be demolished. However, once those buildings are demolished, the lots are too small to rebuild, creating more of a housing issue. The City of Altoona is looking at revising the current zoning regulations so that those lots may be used to replenish the housing stock. Donna added that she attended a meeting where they discussed how the City will have building options (plans) available for those smaller lots.
- Missy explained that fees collected through the Recorder of Deeds on recording deeds and mortgages funds the Blair County Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) Demolition Program. The current demolition guidelines, which require a municipality match, are being reviewed and revisions are to be put in place so that all county municipalities can benefit from utilizing the funds.
- Tricia added that the AHTF will be revisiting its Sustainable Housing Program to see what revisions may be needed to get that program back up and running.
- Mike stated that the Healthy Community Living program is very well run and a benefit to the community. Mike would like Charleton, director of Healthy Community Living, invited to speak at a future meeting.
- Anyone in need of housing should be referred to Center for Community Action.

8. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin stated the CONTACT Altoona phone lines were down for three (3) hours this past Tuesday.
- Two clients that Erin sees through her Peer Mentor Team (PMT) are moving out of their personal care homes. Erin hopes to be able to continue to see them. Erin is the only member of the team and she visits, monthly, former Torrance State Hospital residents who remain in the county and opt for that service.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Aimee made a correction to her report. Sponsorship packets and vendor registration will be available on February 11, 2026 for the annual NAMI Conference (April 30, 2026 at the Blair County Convention Center).
- NAMI will be attending the Go Reentry Banquet on March 3, 2026. This organization helps those who are leaving incarceration and returning to their communities.
- NAMI has relocated within the H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center, 711 9th Ave., Altoona. Support groups have increased due to this move.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria reported that The Arc of Blair County is working on legislation (House Bill 700) which introduces dedicated and predictable funding for intellectual disabilities and autism through ODP. If not kicked out, this will be a lengthy process.
- The Tim Tebow Foundation has dedicated funds for a prom called, “Night to Shine” for individuals with special needs. The event will be hosted by Catalyst Church in Altoona. The event will be held on February 13, 2026. Volunteers are still needed.
- Maria stated that there is a statewide effort to revamp the (Special Education) Oversight Committee. The Arc partners with Intermediate Unit 8 (IU8), which covers four (4) counties, Blair, Cambria, Bedford & Somerset. They will be working together to change the image of Oversight Committee.
- The Arc will be hosting a speaker, Dr. Chris Wolford, on May 14, 2026.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Health Care Quality Units are moving to performance-based contracting
- North Star Support Services has 10 new Support Coordinators
- Blue Angels hired a Behavior Support Services Director Daphne Espenlaub
- CRI hired an ID Specialist in Altoona
- Discontinuing the penny has caused some issues for providers. It is recommended to clearly mark on the ledger – create a line that notes the discrepancy in change. Licensing may provide direction/recommendations in the future.
- Medication Administration Errors need to clearly note what happened or it will be sent back.
- MA51 requirements caused some confusion with physicians. The MA51 provides a level of care determination to receive waiver funded services for people with intellectual disabilities/Autism.

20A. PHYSICIAN'S RECOMMENDATION		To the best of my knowledge, the patient's medical condition and related needs are essentially as indicated above. I recommend that the services and care to meet these needs can be provided at the level of care indicated - check ✓ only one			
<input type="checkbox"/> Nursing Facility Clinically Eligible Services to be provided at home or in a nursing facility	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Care Home Services provided in a Personal Care Home	<input type="checkbox"/> ICFID Care Services to be provided at home or in an Intermediate care facility for the intellectually disabled	<input type="checkbox"/> ICF/ORC Care Services to be provided at home or in an Intermediate care facility for consumers with ORCs	<input type="checkbox"/> Inpatient Psychiatric Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please Specify) _____
20B. COMPLETE ONLY IF CONSUMER IS NURSING FACILITY CLINICALLY ELIGIBLE AND WILL BE SERVED IN A NURSING FACILITY.					
ON THE BASIS OF PRESENT MEDICAL FINDINGS THE PATIENT MAY EVENTUALLY RETURN HOME OR BE DISCHARGED.		<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	If Yes, Check ✓ Only One <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Within 180 days <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Over 180 days	
20C. PHYSICIAN'S SIGNATURE					
_____ PHYSICIAN (PRINTED NAME)		_____ TELEPHONE		_____ PHYSICIAN SIGNATURE	
				_____ DATE	

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Donna stated that WISE Women of Blair County will be having their Tribute Dinner on April 15, 2026 at the Blair County Convention Center.
2026 Honorees include:
 Arts & Letters: Katherine Muller
 Business & Professional: Kelly Irwin Adams
 Community Service Volunteer: Tami Hinish
 Education: Dr. Lisa Surkovich
 Non-Profit/Government: Zhorea J. I. McAnuff
 Rising Star: Emma Peterman
 Lifetime Achievement: Janet Pennington
- The PIT Count numbers have not been finalized yet. Ken would like the finalized numbers once available. Kyle will provide that information.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, April 2, 2026 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona, PA

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. at the H.O.P.E. Drop-In, 711 9th Avenue, Altoona, PA

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting