

The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, December 4, 2025 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona

Board Members Present: Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Chris Cohn, Mike Stubler, Steve Martynuska, Rhonda Cadle, Susan Franco, Jeff Colbert and Ken Dean

Board Members Absent: Susanna Tomlinson, Donna Gority, Jane Petroski and Commissioner Burke

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Melissa Gordon, Erin Kay, Aimee Burns, Jamie Henry, Kelly Popich, Lorrie Hetager, and Jennifer Kensinger

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- In Donna's absence, Mike chaired the meeting. Mike called the meeting to order and self-introductions were made.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of the August 7 & October 2, 2025 Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

- **Motion made by Ken Dean to accept the August 7 and October 2, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Kyle Siskron-Leonard seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.**

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

- Tricia reported that Christopher Cohn, Susan Franco and Stephen Martynuska were reappointed to the Social Services Advisory Board. Jennifer Drass and Bonita Shreve were newly appointed to the Board. All terms are effective January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2028.
- Tricia is to check to see if it is possible to have more than 13 board members since there was a talent bank application submitted by an Altoona Area School District employee recommended by former Board member, Matt Dumm.
- An PDF copy of the 2024/2025 Social Services Advisory Board Report was sent out via email prior to the meeting. If a hard copy is desired, attendees are to make their request known to Jen.
- Tricia shared that DSS made strides in improving transitional housing by working with UPMC Juniata House and Healthy Community Living.
- The move to make Penn Highlands Tyrone a designated 302 facility is still in the works.

Nominate/Elect or Retain Advisory Board Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary

- Current Chairperson: Donna Gority
- Current Vice-Chairperson: Susanna Tomlinson
- Current Secretary: Susan Franco
- Tricia is to contact Donna and Susanna to see if they would like to continue their positions on the board prior to a vote. If any other board members would like to be considered for those positions, Tricia asked them to email Jen.
- Sue Franco agreed to retain her position as Secretary. All in attendance approved.

Leadership Coalition Update

- Tricia reported that due to different reporting guidelines, the Income & Expense (I&E) has not been completed. Extension deadlines were requested.
- Due to some providers not spending all their allocations, DSS has approximately \$235,000 in retained funds. Retained requests look similar to last year's. Requests were made by Big Bros/Big Sisters, Blair Drug and Alcohol Program (BDAP), Child Advocates, Family Shelter, HOPE Drop In, NAMI, SASMG, Soar for Life (Infant Mental Health) & Center for Community Action. BDAP has requested funding for

the Warming Center which will be distributed through their emergency housing program. The Warming Center will be open January 5 through March 2, 2026. Once the Leadership Coalition approves the retained funds plan, it will be submitted to the commissioners for their approval before it will be submitted to the State.

5. Mental Health Committee Report

- Mike reported that the presentation by Sean Burns, Executive Director, of the HOPE Drop-In was very impressive.
- Kyle stated that the Mental Health Committee's January 8, 2026 meeting will be held at the HOPE Drop-In.

6. Developmental Programs Committee Report

- Steve stated that Blue Angels presented at the DP meeting. Blue Angels Care has been in Blair County since May 2024 and are taking the necessary steps to be a residential provider once they hit the two year mark.
- Early Intervention is in the process of contracting with the Western PA School for the Deaf.
- Office of Development Programs (ODP) is looking at reducing the reliance on one person homes.
- DP January 2026 is canceled. The next meeting will be March 5, 2026.

7. County Reports

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that funds are flowing, but DSS is not sure how much funding they are to truly receive. Assumptions are that the mental health budget will be flat-funded. DSS has received its 1st & 2nd quarter Human Services Block Grant allocations, but not its non-block grant mental health base funds allocation.
- DSS is looking into the possibility of having a 3rd mental health program specialist. This specialist would work with mental health and/or intellectual disabled individuals who are in the criminal justice system by diverting them to treatment rather than jail. Mike asked if the magistrates were on board with this idea. Tricia stated that DSS would work the District Attorney's (DA) office to establish that relationship. Ken asked if DSS talked to anyone in the Public Defender's (PD) office about the idea because they have been working on getting a case manager into the DA's office for years. At this point, Tricia answered that the PD has not been consulted.
- Tricia stated that since the County hiring freeze has been lifted, DSS is looking to fill its vacant Fiscal Specialist position.

Mental Health – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that due to the holidays, mental health activities are at a lull.
- Tricia stated that due to the budget impasse, DSS was not able to pay for Christmas presents for Torrance State Hospital residents, so DSS and its partners worked together to purchase gifts for them.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa reported Blair County is low on residential providers. Six people are still waiting for housing, and their supports coordinators are looking across the State for housing for that person. Melissa contacted a Lancaster provider, Faithful Homes. They are a select provider that specializes in medically complex folks. They are willing to explore Blair County to see if it is feasible to provide services here. However, they are a "for profit" organization. Keystone and Mainstay providers have partnered and are willing to look at expanding residential services.
- A provider asked SASMG to start a Residential Forum. Once established, a schedule will be sent out in January 2026. Issues will be discussed as well as Performance Based Contracting. All Blair residential providers are on the primary (base) tier level and are unable to accept anyone new with complex needs.
- ODP approved SASMG's Multi Year Growth Strategies plan and SASMG will now be able to move around unused waiver funds to create new waiver opportunities for those on a waiting list.

Early Intervention (EI) – Kelly Popich

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Kelly reported that EI's funding is flowing. EI received a 13.8 million increase. They are looking for infant/toddler rate increases.
- 2024/2025 Family Survey results are in SASMG's updates.
- Special Instruction Hearing contract is progressing now that cyber liability insurance has been confirmed.
- Service issues EI is facing is families requesting specific days and times especially evenings. In-person appointments are also hard to come by, but these are low incident referrals.
- 2024/2025 data is in the annual board report.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- In Missy's absence, Tricia stated that housing funding is flowing again.
- Trina's Rehabilitation Housing program funding and Missy's Code Compliance Program funding did get expended during the budget impasse. Due to limited funding, going forward the Code Compliance Program is not going to accept any applications that exceed the \$5,000 project cap. DSS is looking at the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) Demolition guidelines to see if those funds can be used to help with those projects.

8. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin reported that CONTACT Altoona is still collecting for Toys for Tots.
- Seventy (70) more 12 Days of CONTACT Christmas tickets were sold this year than last year for a total of 759. First winning ticket will be pulled today.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- NAMI continues to have its monthly support groups.
- A NAMI Basics class was just completed. 3 of the 4 people, who participated, finished the class.
- Peer to Peer and Family to Family courses are in progress.
- 2026 courses are being planned.
- NAMI will be moving to a new location in January 2026. 711 9th Avenue, Altoona which is in the same building as the H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center.
- At this time, NAMI has two speakers scheduled for its April 2026 conference. A Save the Date was emailed out.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria was not in attendance.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Health Care Quality Unit Update – Sandy Corrigan
 - Geisinger is developing a more user-friendly website.
 - Look for a survey to come out in the spring. The survey will be looking for training that is wanted and different training times. Once-a-month evening training is being considered.
 - Please keep in mind this time of year can be difficult for anyone whether it is physical or mental. Greif and trauma could be a trigger to someone. The cold weather could also be a trigger.
 - Sany attended a Provider Town Hall with Safe in Home. She was very impressed with the resources they provided.
- Support Coordination Updates
 - North Star has hired a new staff member. Her name is Kristy Cogan. She will be taking most of Cassidy Arnold Crust's case load. Cassidy will be her supervisor.
- Blue Angels provided all staff members a turkey for Thanksgiving.
- Provider Qualification Document Record Training at SASMG – Rosie

- SASMG will be holding mandatory trainings on provider qualification document record. Training will be held on two separate days, December 9th and December 16th. Providers can attend both or just one. No registration is required. ODP expects the spreadsheet to be a living document that is constantly updated.
- Medication error incidents – Jaime
 - Starting this month, all medication errors will be reviewed. If the agency shows an increase from month to month, Jaime will be following up for clarification and what providers are doing to reduce the amount of medication errors.
 - When entering medication errors, please be as specific as possible in all fields that are mandatory, especially in the fields where you're choosing the reason why the medication had occurred. Unknown shouldn't be entered.
- Providers who will be presenting at future DP Committee Meeting - Kaylee from One Well volunteered for January and Charles Lansberry from TLC volunteered for March.

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Steve thanked Jen for taking the monetary donations that will be divided between the Warming Center and the H.O.P.E. Drop-In Center. A total of one hundred and seventy dollars was collected.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 5, 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, January 8, 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