

**The Blair County Department of Social Services
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, June 5, 2025 at 11:30 AM
SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona**

Board Members Present: Chris Cohn, Kyle Siskron-Leonard, Donna Gority, Jane Petroski, Susan Franco, Susanna Tomlinson and Ken Dean

Board Members Absent: Steve Martynuska, Jeff Colbert, Mike Stubler, Dana Melton and Commissioner Burke

Others Present: Tricia Johnson, Missy Gillin, Melissa Gordon, Erin Kay, Lorrie Hetager, Maria Brandt, Jamie Henry, Jennifer Kensinger and Aimee Burns

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Call to Order

- Donna Gority welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

2. Public Comment

- No public comments were received.

3. Approval of December 5, 2024, February 6, 2025 & April 3, 2025 Advisory Board Minutes

- *Motion made by Susanna Tomlinson to accept the December 5, 2024, February 6 & April 3, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Chris Cohn seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.*

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

- Social Services Advisory Board By-Laws Amendments
 - Tricia reported that the latest amendment to the by-laws is regarding the Finance and Allocations Committee. The amendment will now reflect that the Blair County Leadership Coalition is responsible for decisions regarding the Human Services Block Grant (HSBG), Human Service Development Funds (HSDF) and Housing Assistance Program (HAP) funds. The updated by-laws were emailed out to the Board members prior to the meeting and copies were made available at the in-person meeting.
 - Due to a lack of quorum, which is two-thirds of the Board, the by-laws vote was tabled.
 - Suggestions were made to ask all Board members, who cannot attend the August 7, to briefly call-in or jump on virtually to be able to vote in real-time on the amended by-laws.
 - Donna asked for a few more amendments to the by-laws. Changes requested: the word director (lower case) to be Director (upper case) throughout the document. She also asked that the word Executive be removed from the Executive Director Search Committee title and for it to read Director Search Committee. Tricia will make the requested amendments.
 - Ken Dean asked for the total count of Board members and names of Board members who have not attended in a long time. Tricia answered that there are to be a minimum of 13 Board members. Matt Dumm has resigned from his membership, and Dana Melton has expressed that she is unable to attend meetings regularly, but she has not sent an official resignation. Talent Bank applications, including Roshanda Coffee's, have been submitted to the commissioners for their approval.
- Leadership Coalition Update
 - The Coalition members who participate in the HSBG are working on their program submissions for the 2025/2026 HSBG Annual Plan. The State guidelines have not been released yet.
 - The two (2) required HSBG Public Hearings will be held on Friday, June 13, 2025 at the Greenbean Coffee House, 715 6th Avenue, at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

- Members of the Coalition are discussing ways to have consistent representation from the Commissioners' and Children, Youth & Families office at the monthly meeting. One suggestion has been to change the time of the meeting.

4. **Mental Health Committee Report**

- No updates due to the cancellation of the May 2025 meeting.

5. **Developmental Programs Committee Report**

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Susanna reported that a presentation was given by Kaylee Holsinger of OneWell.

7. **County Reports**

Social Services Director – Tricia Johnson

- Trish reported that an offer has been made and accepted for the Fiscal Officer position. Her start date is the end of June 2025.
- Karen Wise has resigned her position as Fiscal Specialist.
- Jeff Kranch & Sandy Macharola are still doing most of the fiscal duties.
- Tricia stated that DSS gets numerous calls for cash, rental and housing assistance to name a few. DSS staff refers the individuals to the right agency.
- No word about the State budget.

Mental Health – Tricia Johnson

- Tricia reported that Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) training was held April 30 through May 2.
- Nikki McHugh, DSS Program Specialist, is working on getting the Emergency Behavioral Health (EBH) team back up and running.
- Virginia Christy, CASSP Coordinator, is busy with referrals.
- With the fiscal year ending, DSS is working on loose ends with the budget. Any retained HSBG funds will be discussed at a future Leadership Coalition meeting.

Intellectual Disabilities – Melissa Gordon

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Melissa reported that SASMG had a workgroup to discuss and set policies and processes on how they will be transferring unutilized waiver funds to an individual who is currently on the waitlist. Melissa wants to submit SASMG's plan to the Office of Development Programs (ODP) by July 2025. ODP will review the plan and offer suggestions or just approve as is. Once the plan is approved by ODP, SASMG will be granted access to make those requests on a quarterly basis. SASMG will not be getting any additional funding. This is only allowing SASMG to move funds around that are not being used.
- Melissa elaborated on Performance Based Contracting, which allows for Residential Services and Support Coordination Organizations (SCO) to meet certain criteria to determine their tier level, which in turn, determines their funding.
- SASMG finished up with requalifications. Only one provider, Juanita Seely, did not get requalified due to moving to Ohio and opting to no longer provide ID services in Blair County.
- The Arc of Blair County held an Emergency Planning Workshop on May 15, 2025. Future trainings will be planned.
- Sue Franco brought up a concern about Performance Based Contracting. She said that she and other families were interpreting that payments to providers would be aligned with client outcomes. Sue stated that several parents were worried that their severely limited child would be passed over for services based on this contracting. Jamie Henry explained that the goals are for the providers to meet, not the clients who they serve. Melissa said that SASMG will be watching providers to make sure that they are not overlooking clients who may require more services. Jamie added that this contracting process is not even close to being implemented. Aimee Burns and Lorrie Hetager responded that there should be an effort made to reassure families that this process is based on the performance of the provider and not the client.

Early Intervention (EI) – Jamie Henry

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Jamie stated that EI is going through State verification. Five or six ladies are reviewing cases. They look at eleven measures. At this point, it seemed like receiving positive feedback during the exit interview.
- Jamie said that Kelly will share a full report at a future meeting.

Quality Assurance & Housing Coordinator – Missy Gillin

- Missy is working on the 2025/2026 contracts renewals.
- Missy reported that near homeless and homeless numbers are increasing in the County.
- A major need in the County is one-bedroom apartments. Also, affordable housing is still an issue.
- The Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) Code Compliance program is taking off. However, in some situations the work needed is beyond the program's \$5,000 cap per household. In some cases, funds were blended with funds available through Trina Illig's grant programs.
- AHTF Demolition Program funding is being utilized to help demolish blighted property in the County, mainly the City of Altoona. However, it is not creating housing since most of the City lots are not big enough to build on.
- Missy reported that TeamEffort, a faith-based group out of Florida, will be coming to the County the end of June. The rotating groups will be here for six weeks doing light construction, home repairs and landscaping. The AHTF has given \$20,000 to TeamEffort for materials/supplies.
- The Local Housing Options Team (LHOT) has reorganized to discuss ways to bring additional and/or affordable housing to the County.

9. Ex-Officio Reports

CONTACT Altoona – Erin Kay

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Erin stated that she recently lost a PMT client.
- CONTACT Altoona has received its accreditation for three years.
- Erin participated in the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community on May 31.
- In July, Erin is to present at PeerStar and Blair Senior Services.
- Healthy Blair County Coalition is having a BBQ/Summer Olympics on July 12, 2025 at Lakemont Park.
- Duncansville Community Days are scheduled for July 18 & 19.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) – Aimee Burns

- A report was included in the agenda packet.
- Aimee reported that NAMI Basics will now begin a week later than stated in the agenda report.
- NAMI staff will be attending many events throughout the summer.
- The Power of Creativity program will resume in July.
- NAMI Conference date is April 30, 2026.

The Arc – Maria Brandt

- Maria reported that the Emergency Preparedness Training on May 15 was well represented by intellectual disabilities, but mental health and physical disabilities were not. When another training is planned, Maria will ask members of the Advisory Board to get the word out. In the future, she will be requesting, by email, five to ten concerns that members may have if there is an emergency. A committee will review the answers, and an interactive training will be prepared that will represent an emergency that continues to worsen over time. Maria will send an email soon that she would like forwarded to other individuals/agencies.

ID Providers – Lorrie Hetager

- Lorrie reported that The Learning Community is working with their first student from Tyrone School District who is transitioning from high school. The student is working at Bake Shop Bakes. Transportation to the job site is within walking distance.

- SASMG reports that two people have moved out of Residential and into Lifesharing/Supporting Living.
- North Star Support Services will be opening an office in Cambria County. Four Support Coordinators will be leaving Blair County to assist in Cambria County. North Star Support Services has hired four new Support Coordinators.
- Station MD, available 24/7, provides telehealth services to people with intellectual disabilities. They also provide free training monthly. Melissa added that this service aids with cutting down emergency room (ER) visits. If the doctor feels that the individual needs to go to the ER, the Station MD physician will coordinate with the ER.
- Safe-In Home offers remote supports technology. They also do monthly training. The last being on May 28, 2025 on Elopement and Wandering.

Open Forum/Feel Good Stories:

- Sue Franco reported that the Penguin Project, through the Altoona Community Theater (ACT) will be working on a production of the “The Lion King Jr” which will feature participants age eight (8) through twenty-one (21) who have developmental disabilities.

Susanna, who took over for Donna, closed the meeting and thanked everyone who attended.

The next Social Services Advisory Board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 7, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd, Altoona, PA

The next Mental Health Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 4, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. Blair HealthChoices, 81 Holliday Hills Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA

The next Developmental Programs Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 4, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. at SASMG training room, 157 Lakemont Park Blvd. or Virtual Meeting