SUSSEX COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES
VIOLA BROWN, ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR
TAWANA TORAN, DIRECTOR of SUSSEX SOCIAL SERVICES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
February 10, 2026
1:00 p.m.

Call to Order
The meeting was called to order by Ms. Viola Brown, Board Chair, at 1:05p.m.

Roll Call/Determine Quorum
Advisory Board Members Present: Viola Brown, Edythe Brown, Barbara Gray, Winnie Umphlett, Nathelia Wyche, Earl Rogers

Also Present: County Administrator Richard Douglas; DSS Director Tawana Toran; Advisory Board Secretary/Administrative Services Manager Melissia Hill; Benefit Programs Supervisors Jessica Upton and LaVeeta Saunders; Family Services Supervisor Felicia Brewer; Fiscal Manager Jennifer Ellis; and Program Coordinator Titiana Nicholson

Approval of the Agenda and Approval of Board Meeting Minutes – January 13, 2026
Ms. Winnie Umphlett moved to approve the agenda and minutes as presented. Ms. Barbara Gray seconded the motion, and the agenda and minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

Unfinished Business
None at this meeting

New Business
Benefit Programs Report
LaVeeta Saunders gave the update on Benefit Programs for the month of January 2026. A written report is attached to these minutes.

Benefit Supervisors have read 156 case readings so far this year as they prepare to accommodate a state mandate for reading cases.

February is Benefit Programs Appreciation Month, and those units have several activities planned this month that foster relationship and appreciation.

Family Services Report
Ms. Felicia Brewer gave the update on Family Services for the month of January 2026. One child was ordered into care on January 14, 2026, and has been placed in a group home. There are now three youths in group homes.

The child taken into care had been living in another locality, and her mom brought her to Franklin County. She had assault charges in Hampton. Sussex had to pay for her stay at Crater Juvenile Detention Center. She is now in Sussex DSS custody. She will remain in a group home until she turns 18 in a few months.

Our Fostering Future participant completed college in January. She is working, and she has established savings and checking accounts. Family Services is assisting her with finding an apartment.

FSS is still trying to set up a meeting with the Improvement Association about helping residents with utility bills.

FSS is working to get certified for CANS and working to complete certification for long-term screening.

Program Coordinator Report
Ms. Titiana Nicholson gave an update on CSA activities for the month of January 2026.
There are currently 34 children in care. Of these, 15 are DSS referrals, 16 are Sussex County Public School referrals, and three are Greater Community Services Board referrals.

Administrative Services Report
Ms. Melissia Hill provided an update on Administrative Services. A copy of her report is attached to these minutes. For the month of January 2026, there were 1070 phone calls received, 175 clients who visited the agency, and 74 EBT vault cards issued.

During the agency closure due to inclement weather, and due to a Board of Supervisors member's concern about the elderly population, Ms. Hill was directed to forward the office phone to an agency cell phone in case someone called and needed assistance because they lost power during the bad weather. During the period when the office was closed, she answered approximately 90 phone calls. Thankfully, none of our senior citizens requested assistance. Family Services had to remain on call in case of CPS or APS reports. A majority of the phone calls received were about submitted paperwork and benefits being issued on time for February.

Director's Report
Ms. Tawana Toran provided an update on the agency.

- A homeless man came in for care the day before the ice/snowstorm, and we were able to place him at a local hotel for two weeks. Before that he was living in a shed. Ms. Jean Hill-Atkins took him money from her personal funds to help with food, and Tawana took him his EBT card once it was available. Ms. Amanda Armstrong was his worker, and she went above and beyond to make sure his basic needs were met.
- Ms. Toran has submitted a deviation request to the state so that we can deviate for holidays and inclement weather. It has to be approved by the Board of Virginia Department of Social Services. It will take a few months before a decision is made. If approved, it would make us a partially deviating agency.
- The Governor's budget may make localities responsible for absorbing administrative costs that are no longer covered by the federal government. If this happens, it will have to be determined how $67,000.00 of administrative costs will be covered. This will affect budget lines 849 and 855.
- The new Public Safety Coordinator Chris and Ms. Toran met with Ms. Jennifer Sharp from the state's emergency response agency, and she will assist in putting processes in place for the county that will make us more responsive in the case of an emergency. This includes helping with CPR certifications and conducting mock shelter trainings.

- Sussex DSS has three teams assigned to shelter duty. There was discussion about Family Services working the shelter because they have to be on call for CPS and APS. It was also discussed whether private businesses and churches would be able to assist in some way.
- The leadership team got a salary increase when the Program Coordinator moved from the county to Sussex DSS.

County Administrator's Report

Mr. Douglas gave an update on county-related matters.

- Mr. Douglas has met with Public Safety Coordinator Chris and other county officials regarding the county being ready in case a shelter has to open due to inclement weather or other emergency situations. If the schools are open, the shelter cannot open at the school.
- Please let Mr. Douglas know if churches and the Improvement Association would be willing to operate a warming shelter. Ms. Toliver-Moore may be able to help with the use of her building, Jessica Ann Moore foundation.
- Shelters are only mandated if the state declares an emergency. We get additional resources when the state declares a state of emergency. The county has to declare a state of emergency in order to receive state resources.
- There is no heat on our side of the building. We are not sure when the unit will be fixed.. Employees are still working and have been coming in at 10:00 a.m. Portable heating units are due to be installed tomorrow.
- Mr. Douglas will do a presentation next week on the county's health insurance. The county covers its employees' insurance premium at 100% and offers a discounted rate for family members.
- Ms. Nathelia Wyche, Advisory Board member, lost her mother. She was 97-years-old.
- Social Services is fully staffed now.

Public Comments

None at this time.

Board Members' Comments

- Ms. Winnie Umphlett commended the agency for remaining open and working with no heat.
- Ms. Edythe Brown thanked the agency for their hard work.
- Ms. Viola Brown remarked on the enthusiasm leadership displayed when giving their reports.
- Ms. Barbara Gray spoke of the positive changes Sussex DSS has made.

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Ms. Nathelia Wyche, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:22 p.m.

Submitted by,

Melissia Hill

Melissia Hill
Sussex DSS Advisory Board Secretary