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

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
January 13, 2026
1:00 p.m.

Call to Order
The meeting was called to order by Ms. Viola Brown, Board Chair, at 1:00 p.m.

Introduction of New Employee – Ms. Tawana Toran introduced Ms. Titiana Nicholson, Program Coordinator, as Sussex DDS' new staff member. Ms. Nicholson had previously worked for Sussex County before transferring to DSS.

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

Also Present: County Administrator Richard Douglas; DSS Director Tawana Toran; Advisory Board Secretary/Administrative Services Manager Melissia Hill; Benefit Programs Supervisor Jessica Upton; Family Services Specialist IV Arneisesha Hayes; Fiscal Manager Jennifer Ellis; and Program Coordinator Titiana Nicholson

Approval of the Agenda and Approval of Board Meeting Minutes – November 10, 2025

Ms. Edythe Brown moved to approve the agenda and minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Winnie Umphlett, and the agenda and minutes were approved with unanimous consent.

Unfinished Business
None at this meeting

New Business

Benefit Programs Report
Ms. Jessica Upton gave the update on Benefit Programs for the month of November 2025. A written report is attached to these minutes.

Ms. Upton was asked to explain the differences in the Energy Assistance Programs. Fuel is a program that only runs for about a month (October to November). It is for fuel costs: electricity, gas, oil, propane, firewood, or kerosene. Approvals are based on household size. Fuel season is now over; everything has been double-checked and closed out for the season.

Crisis is a program that helps to repair or replace broken equipment. If you are completely out of gas or propane, it can also help with that. It helps with disconnections if there is an approved heating source. Crisis ends March 15, 2026.

Ms. Tawana Toran provided comparison numbers for 2021-2025. These numbers are found on the VDSS website. Numbers have remained consistent. The residential population has remained consistent over the past two to three years. Sussex County has around 10,600 residents. Various indicators show that the county's population has increased slowly.

Child Care numbers have increased because more residents are working and participating in the childcare program. There is also a new waiting list process.

Family Services Report
Ms. Arneisesha Hayes an update on Family Services. A copy of that report is attached. Ms. Toran provided comparison numbers for 2021-2025. A copy of this report is attached.

Mr. Richard Douglas asked about children-in-care trends. The highest number of children in case was 21 children in 2023. One family is still in court proceedings, and parental rights have not been terminated. The goal is adoption for this family.

There is an unusual case pending that involves children who actually reside in North Carolina.

CPS referrals increased significantly in 2025. Local agencies and residents are more likely to report suspected abuse because the confidence has grown that we will respond timely and appropriately to referrals.

We have one Fostering Futures client who will be turning 21 years old in May, and she will be discharged from the program at this time. There is concern about how this young lady will move forward without the guidance of Social Services. We are not sure if we will be able to remain in contact with her after discharge.

Trial placement is when the child returns home to the parent on a trial basis. There is a pending case that will be heard in March for this client.

APS referrals have increased because there are many elderly residents who need assistance.

Waverly Healthcare is a large part of Ms. Hayes' caseload. Self-neglect and financial exploitation reports are increasing in the agency.

Group homes in the county are not doing well. There are several cases of abuse. This trend can be found across the state.

Mr. Douglas wanted to know if there is a way to compare our numbers to other localities with a similar size. We will look into that.

Program Coordinator

Children's services is a program established per locality where the county receives funding from the federal and state governments to cover at risk youth. Usually, the children who are helped are referred by foster care, schools, DJJ court services, and CSB mental health agencies.

Ms. Nicholson is responsible for ensuring she has the documentation needed to pay approved charges as presented to the Community Management team. This is a working group of school officials, community advocates, and DSS workers who help approve requests for services needed

for such children. The team also consists of juvenile justice representatives, the health department, school officials, parent representatives – total group of seven. This group has to sign off on funding.

The FAPT team reviews and approves funding. Any child who has a school IEP with mental health disorders, kids who get in trouble, and every foster child comes through FAPT. The county pays 25 percent of this funding, and the state pays the balance.

Services that are recommended and approved include private day schooling, one-on-one support, transitional support (from private day school back to public school), psychological therapy, occupational and physical therapy, mentoring, and almost any service the team feels will benefit the child. There are currently 32 kids receiving services, of which 14 are children who are referred by Social Services; 15 are referred by educational providers and administrators, and three referred by District 19 CSB.

Number of Children	Range of Ages
3	0-3 years
3	4-6 years
12	7-12 years
11	13-17 years
3	18-21 years

There are 26 males and six females in care. If the kids leave the locality, they may still be eligible for services that would have to be paid by Sussex.

Administrative Services Report
Ms. Melissia Hill provided an update on Administrative Services. A copy of her report is attached to the minutes. For the month of December 2025, there were:

- 835 telephone calls were received, 237 visitors, and 24 EBT vault cards were issued. In addition, there were 38 MA/SNAP/TANF applications registered, 14 expedited SNAP applications registered, six crisis applications registered, six PIPP applications registered, and two childcare applications registered. These numbers do not include SNAP and Medicaid renewals and interim reports that were received, scanned, and uploaded.
- One of the HSAs went to the home office for training in December.

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

- The proposed DSS food bank was halted because the government shutdown is over, and the county has multiple food banks to assist Sussex residents.
- We are a non-deviating agency, and that status affects when we can close for holidays and unforeseen events. The director is working to deviate from the state regarding holidays and inclement weather.
- Budget season has begun for the FY27 budget. Our big-ticket meeting is February 12th or 14th. Ms. Toran will make a presentation during that meeting.
- The federal government changes to the administration of SNAP funds have taken effect. Our administrative cost is 50/50, but it will move to 25 (state/federal)/75 (county). The SNAP admin costs will be absorbed by the state. Until then, we will include it in our budget. We have to wait for the new governor to offer her budget. For us, it will be a difference of

$67,000.00 if the state does not absorb those administrative costs. That amount is dependent on RMS. The state uses that information for funding as well. Any changes will take effect on October 1, 2026. This includes the cost of training the workers and quality control.

- Mr. Duke Storen is the new VDSS administrator.
- We are getting our reimbursements again. There are programmatic changes coming. Medicaid has new work requirements that will take effect in 2027. Once we are made aware of the specific changes and receive training, the new requirements will be rolled out.
- The SNAP error rate will affect local funding. The payment error rate has to be below six percent statewide. The state will have to pay extra if the statewide error rate exceeds six percent. Agencies who are above the error rate will affect the localities who are under the error rate.
- We are now fully staffed.
- Virginia Department of Health does not plan to move out of their space in this building.
- There were 22 Thanksgiving dinners delivered to seniors in November, along with canned food items.

County Administrator's Report

Mr. Douglas has been engaged throughout the meeting and has no formal report at this time.

Public Comments

None at this time.

Board Members' Comments

None at this time

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Ms. Barbara Gray and seconded by Ms. Winnie Umphlett. The meeting was adjourned at 2:17 p.m.

Submitted by,

Melissia Hill

Melissia Hill
Sussex DSS Advisory Board Secretary