

**Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
January 28, 2025**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Jacobs, Board Secretary, took roll call. A quorum was present.

Members Present: (In-person participants are bolded)

Charlotte Balensiefen, Ali Braboy, Sue Britt, Susan Bursztynsky, Robin Camplain, **Mary Cork**, Bernene Dahl, **David Ditzler**, Stephanie Foes, Lynnae Garrett, **Al Harmon**, **Darlene Hartmann**, Marcia Heuer, John Hockstadt, **Tom Howes**, **Julie Jacobs**, Betty Johnson, Lisa Johnson, Betsy Kinder, **Ron Kleppin**, Kenneth Krogulski, Brad Lindstrom, **Ginny McPerryman**, Inga Neuner, Linda Pennell, Becky Rich, **David Torres**, Marissa Trumper, **Jeanne Vargas**, and Laura Watters.

Members Absent:

Reed Akre, Kim Dahl, BJ Holocker, Kristy Jones, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, and Derek Whited.

Others Present:

Jill Calkins, Rachael DeSpain, Dawn Kanzler, Brandi Newell, Tammy Saenz, Wayne Thompson, Jaime Vos, and Neddie Watts.

Minutes:

The November 26, 2024, Board Minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the minutes, which Ms. Jacobs seconded. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

The October and November 2024 Financial Reports were provided to the membership for review prior to tonight's meeting. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to accept the October and November 2024 Financial Reports and file them for audit. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Federal Pause in Funding:

Ms. Calkins reported that the Trump Administration had issued a temporary pause on all federal grants and loan disbursements to implement a series of executive orders he signed during his first days in office. These executive orders include Protecting the American People Against Invasion, Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid, Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements, Unleashing American Energy, Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing. The temporary pause is to provide the administration time to review agency programs and

determine the best uses of the funding for those programs consistent with the law and the President's priorities. The pause was to become effective today at 5:00 p.m. EST.

She has been conversing with funders and associations all day to understand what this means for the Agency's operations, but the situation has been fluid, with different sources providing sometimes conflicting information. A recent OMB Q&A document states that funds for small businesses, farmers, Pell grants, Head Start, rental assistance, and other similar programs will not be paused. We do not yet know how CSBG, LIHEAP, FGP, or Weatherization will be affected. Just as she was leaving the office tonight, a federal judge issued a "brief administrative stay" through at least Monday, halting any attempt to pause federal funding. She will continue to closely monitor and gather information on this very fluid situation so that we clearly understand its impact on our Agency programs, if any, and will keep the Board informed.

Unfortunately, the chaos this has presented has agencies frantically trying to draw down funds but having difficulty accessing the Payment Management System (PMS). This system is used to draw down funds for some of our programs. To safeguard the next two payrolls, one due this Friday, Ms. Calkins sought Board approval to access the Edward Jones unrestricted funds if this situation is unresolved. Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve Ms. Calkins' ability to access the unrestricted funds for this purpose, and Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Personnel Committee Report:

Mr. Harmon sought full Board approval of the 2025 Salary/Wage Classification by Position chart, as presented and recommended by the Personnel Committee. Ms. Balensiefen made a motion to approve the 2025 Salary/Wage and Classification by Position document, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. Mr. Harmon further explained the document and its importance. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler reported that the December ending book balance was \$5,824.07, and as of December 31, 2024, a balance of \$441,522 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank.

She brought members' attention to the unrestricted funds account with Edward Jones on page 4 of the financial statements and noted that the account had an annual gain of \$55,255.70, leaving an ending balance of \$457,985.34.

The Agency's unemployment insurance rate decreased from 8.65% to 7.85% on taxable wages of \$13,916. This equates to an annual employer savings of \$83.13 for each employee who makes that wage threshold.

The Executive Package of insurance (Director and Officers, Employment Practices Liability, Employee Theft, ERISA Fidelity, Fiduciary Liability computer fraud, identity fraud, forgery or alteration of checks) was renewed with Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America for a three-year policy cost of

\$5,511. This amount decreased by \$16. Another proposal the broker received almost doubled the renewal policy's cost.

The worker's compensation policy with United Heartland was also renewed for \$126,974, an annual increase of \$3,627. Bids were sought, but one carrier declined, and the other requested a loss control visit. It was decided to renew with United Heartland and seek bids next year.

Lastly, she reported that the Internal Revenue Service increased the standard mileage rate for personal vehicles for business from .67/mile to .70/mile, effective January 1, 2025.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts

Ms. Watts informed the Board that their packets included two monitoring review letters from October and November. She began by discussing the IDHS Emergency and Transitional Housing and Homeless Prevention Program review, which was performed in October. She noted that both programs fully complied with program requirements and no corrective actions were necessary. The other letter was from the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program review conducted in November. This comprehensive review evaluated the program's overall status, including administrative policies and procedures, Board of Director activities, human resources policies and procedures, equal opportunity and affirmative action review, client outreach and marketing, work program compliance, fiscal compliance, and procurement procedures. She stated that the only follow-up necessary was adding a timeframe on the Client Grievance Policy for which clients would have a timeline for receiving a response from the EO/AA Officer after filing a grievance. Besides that small follow-up, the program also complies with all program requirements.

She reported that all programs diligently collect data and information to compile the CSBG Annual Report 2024. This comprehensive report, to be presented to the Board next month, will showcase the significant number of individuals and families served in 2024 and the impressive outcomes and goals achieved by those who sought assistance.

On the morning of January 23, a Point-In-Time count was conducted within the 15-county Continuum of Care. This count is required annually by HUD to help determine how many homeless individuals were sleeping outside, in the shelter, or in any other place not meant for human habitation. Outreach staff begin their day at 5:00 am and drive to known locations where homeless individuals stay. This year, many collaborated with local law enforcement to gather additional information to help obtain a more substantial count. Staff then end up in their offices between 7:00 and 8:00 am and call local shelters, police departments, hospitals, etc., and ask if they have encountered any homeless individuals overnight and gather demographic information if possible. All numbers are then reported back to Ms. Watts, and she submits them to the Continuum of Care, in which they report all 15-county numbers to HUD. These numbers are significant because they determine how much funding is received to help house these individuals.

Ms. Watts sought Board approval to accept an additional \$136,000 from the Continuum of Care for the DHS Rapid Rehousing Program. She explained that these funds assist homeless individuals and families attain permanent housing while receiving supportive services. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the acceptance of the additional funds, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

January also marks the start of the agency's review of 2024 households that have excelled in achieving goals from Agency programs. These outstanding households are nominated for the Family of Distinction program, sponsored by our State partner, IACAA. Ms. Watts invited interested Board members to review all nominations submitted by staff. Members can see her after the meeting or call or email her before the end of the month to express their interest in participating in the review process. Applications will be reviewed in February. Jeanne Vargas, Julie Jacobs, Charlotte Balensiefen, and Marissa Trumper volunteered to serve on this committee.

Finally, she reported that during the 2024 year, staff from CSBG and Head Start attended 55 events, which included Back-to-School nights with local school districts, job, veteran, child, and senior fairs, county fairs, National Night Outs with local police departments, and many more. She highlighted the significant impact of these two new team partnerships between CSBG and Head Start, which have improved and will continue to enhance as they begin meeting to strengthen relationships and improve communication. This "Team Talk" initiative, a series of structured meetings and discussions, is a testament to our commitment to supporting the families we serve and fostering a collaborative and communicative work environment.

CSBG Grantee Compliance Coordinator: Jaime Vos

Ms. Vos provided an update on the Risk Management Plan. An organization-wide, comprehensive risk assessment was completed in 2023. From this assessment, the Agency developed a working Risk Management Plan. Almost all of the tasks have been completed or are in process. A new organization-wide risk assessment will be completed in September 2025.

Ms. Vos, the Grantee Compliance Coordinator, reported that the 2nd Annual Charity Softball Tournament and Family Picnic was a success. The Agency raised \$10,820, which is just a little less than the previous year's total of \$11,758. Some of the money was used to purchase over 80 unhoused personal care bags, which were disbursed to Pads shelters in Sterling, Dixon, Peru, and Ottawa.

Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell

Ms. Newell sought board approval to submit the \$373,539 AmeriCorps continuation grant application. This is the funding source for the Foster Grandparent Program, which supports 48 senior volunteers. The grant continuation is for year two of a three-year grant and covers the fiscal year of July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026. The application is due March 10, 2025, and awards will be announced in June 2025. Mr.

Kleppin made a motion to approve the submission of the grant application, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Two of the program's 52 volunteers have left as of December 31, 2025. There are now 50 volunteers in service, with a few due to return from leaves of absence over the next month or two. In anticipation of losing more volunteers than usual from their ranks when they reconvene in the fall for the 2025/2026 school year, the program is in recruitment mode. Ms. Newell asks that board members share any senior events in their communities with the FGP office. Income-based independent living communities and word of mouth are traditionally the best marketing avenues for the program.

Ms. Newell reported that a new "final rule" aimed at modernizing AmeriCorps Seniors programs allows programs that offer stipends to use non-federal funds to increase the volunteer stipend above the \$4/hr. allowed by AmeriCorps Seniors. Working within the anticipated budget, the program hopes to offer a \$4.50/hr. stipend to volunteers beginning July 1, 2025. The additional stipend amount beyond the federal amount will be dependent on funding each fiscal year.

December activities were a hit for Foster Grandparent volunteers. They are excited to connect with the volunteers for the first time in 2025 at their February 7th in-service and are anxious to learn how many of our volunteers have embraced their new Amazon Echo technology.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain

Ms. DeSpain shared that Director Garvin from the Office of Head Start notified the program in writing on Friday, December 13, 2024, that they had won the appeal process. The Federal Funding Level did not change (1,634,980 program operations and 30,459 training and technical assistance). The Federal Enrollment Level was revised (reduced from 116 to 77) to match what was requested during the appeal hearing while maintaining a mixed delivery service model throughout the Early Head Start program.

She next explained action is needed to approve the 2025 Early Head Start/Head Start selection criteria. The program developed these criteria for selecting children verified as "eligible" based on age and income criteria. This is a point-based system intended to ensure that children and families of most need have enrollment priority. In addition, it is used to develop and maintain a waiting list that ranks expectant persons/children/families according to their assigned points. Modifications are noted below:

- Additional Social Eligibility Criteria:
 - Alcohol/Substance Abuse (a person living in the home)
 - Domestic Violence (living in DVS/shares story during recruitment)
 - Deported Parent
 - Non-English-Speaking Parent
 - Non-English-Speaking Child (only applies to the child being recruited)
 - Sudden Economic Hardship (job loss within 90 days)
 - Teen Parent/s 14 Years and Younger
 - Teen Parent/s 15 Years to 17 Years

- Combine Additional Social Eligibility Sections (Head Start and Early Head Start)

Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve the 2025 Early Head Start/Head Start Selection Criteria, and Ms. Balensifen seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Next Ms. DeSpain informed the Board that on the evening of December 18, 2024, an email was received regarding a child safety concern. Immediate action was taken, internal investigation procedures began, and video surveillance was viewed. After completing the internal investigation, the program terminated the employment of the involved teacher and reported the child incident to the Department of Children and Family Services and the Office of Head Start. The Department of Children and Family Services has begun its investigation. Updates will likely only be provided once the investigation is final and a decision regarding that reportable incident is made. The Office of Head Start has an outlined process related to reported child incidents; after reviewing the internal investigation documents and viewing the video footage, they have determined that a Risk Assessment Notification (RAN) is necessary. RAN reviews are initiated when OHS needs to gather more information about significant incidents affecting program participants' health and safety. They specifically focus on abuse, neglect, inappropriate conduct, inadequate supervision, or unauthorized releases in Head Start programs.

The program was also notified that it will have its Focus Area 1 review the week of March 3, 2025—more details to follow.

Lastly, Ms. DeSpain informed the membership that the program would like to submit a second Change in Scope, resulting in a second reduction in the number of Head Start children served. Internal and external data, the assessment of community needs, and the ability to meet wage, benefit, and mental health support requirements outlined in the newly revised Head Start Performance Standards support this request. A document that outlines the proposed changes was provided. Discussion followed. Ms. DeSpain sought Board approval to submit a Change in Scope requesting modifications to the Head Start Preschool program. This approval confirms the Board of Directors' support for reducing 60 program slots as allowed by the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of Head Start. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the submission of the Change of Scope as discussed, and Ms. Garrett seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided copies of the November and December 2024 Policy Council minutes, November and December Board Reports, the T.C.O.C. EHS/HS Selection Criteria, the letter from Director Garvin including the appeal results, the Notice of Award issued after the appeal, an enrollment status report, FA1 45-Day notice, job posting listing handout, Board In-Kind report, and the non-federal in-kind donation sheet.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): Tammy Saenz

Ms. Saenz reported that the LIHEAP program continues to be very busy. The emergency applications are slowing down, which gives them a chance to concentrate on processing the regular applications. To date LIHEAP has entered 6,113 applications which is about the same total as last year.

The department has put furnace applications on hold due to the high number of applications already taken for furnace emergencies. They are keeping track of the calls for furnaces with their name, phone number and date called so that they can reach out to customers should there be any remaining funds once all current outstanding furnaces costs are paid.

The PIPP program continues to struggle with the Com Ed issues. The state continues to work with ComED, but the issue remains unresolved. Customers are frustrated with the conflicting statements they are receiving. No re-certifications are being done to these issues.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson reported that they continue to work on setting up the new Weatherization system (IWX) for Weatherization applications, assessments, and work orders. All of the field staff, including Mr. Thompson, have been through the training for the new system, but they continue to have issues getting everything to work correctly. Mr. Thompson and a staff member attended a contractor classroom training to get the contractors up to speed and give agency staff a glimpse into what the contractors are seeing and experiencing in the field. DCEO has a way to go before getting all the bugs worked out, but they are getting jobs out, completed, and paid for after inspection. It is slow going, to be sure. They will continue to train and work with the system until it is mastered.

He reminded the membership that the application portal is now active and to refer all potential customers to the Agency's website, www.tcohelps.org. Under the Weatherization tab, they will find a turquoise tab that says "Apply On-Line." Customers will go to that site and complete their Pre-Application. Once complete, it will be reviewed by the program's office staff. Once their application is deemed eligible and their priority number is approved, they will be prompted to complete the full application, and an assessment will be scheduled.

Mr. Thompson sought Board approval to enter into the 2025 Northern Utility Home Energy Savings-Braided IHWAP Initiative. This grant is to braid Weatherization funds with funds from the northern utilities, Nicor and Com-Ed, to complete 14 homes between January 1 and December 19, 2025. The projected budget is \$101,588 in total. \$70,000 is for Material and Labor applied directly to the homes, and \$31,588 is for Program Support and Administration costs. Program Support and Administration will be paid at approximately the exact percentages as the regular Weatherization Program. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve entering into the 2025 agreement, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, he sought Board approval to enter into the 2025 Southern Utility Income Qualified Initiative. This grant combines Weatherization funds with funds from the Southern utility, Ameren, to complete up to 18 homes between January 1 and December 31, 2025. No specific budget amount was provided for this project, but it is projected to be around \$100,000 as well. Program Support and Administration will be paid at approximately the same percentages as the regular Weatherization Program. Mr. Howes made a

motion to approve entering into the 2025 agreement, and Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins

Ms. Calkins reports that the current Board vacancies are for Whiteside County, Category A, and LaSalle County, Category B.

Ms. Calkins shared that, in light of the Agency's ongoing struggles with some of the Agency-owned affordable housing units, they are looking for members to volunteer to serve on a committee. This isn't a new issue, but the deficit continues to increase, and it is essential that the Board understand the concerns, discuss the problems, and make some decisions regarding them. She sought volunteers. Inga Neuner, Tom Howes, David Ditzler and Al Harmon volunteered. If others are interested, please let Ms. Calkins know.

In tonight's handouts, members received a copy of the Planning/Evaluation Committee Meeting Minutes. The committee met in December to review and analyze the feedback provided by those who completed the 2024 Board Self-Evaluation and to determine a plan of action for 2025. She explained that the committee identified three target topics: Public Relations/Fundraising, Committee Participation, and Board training. Ms. Calkins reviewed the action steps under each topic.

Also included in tonight's handouts is a copy of the 2025 Board Year-at-a-Glance. This is basically a monthly outline of Board actions, committee meetings, etc. that routinely take place throughout the year. While these dates may vary somewhat due to funder requests, etc., keeping these dates at the forefront of our minds helps to ensure that the requirements are met.

In November, Ms. Calkins provided the membership with a copy of the Conflict of Interest Policy, a sign-off form, and a current vendor list. Members were asked to review the policy and the vendor list and complete the sign-off document. To date, she has received 26 sign-offs. Members who have not completed and submitted the sign-off sheet were asked to do so immediately. She brought additional copies tonight if anyone needs one. She will send an email to those whom she is missing.

The Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual has been updated with the changes approved at the November meeting. A copy was sent out via email, and a hard copy was mailed to the 4 members for whom she doesn't have an email address. If anyone who was emailed a copy prefers a hard copy, please let Ms. Calkins know, and she will send one in the mail.

Lastly, Ms. Calkins took a moment to recognize and thank members with excellent attendance during 2024. Several members had 80-90% attendance at the meetings in 2024. This includes Stephanie Foes, Ron Preston, Juanita Randklev, Ken Krogulski, David Torres, and Sue Britt. In addition, six members attended 100% of meetings in 2024. These members were John Hockstadt, Marcia Heuer, Lisa Johnson,

Betty Johnson, Al Harmon, and Jeanne Vargas. Thank you. Your consistent commitment and engagement are deeply appreciated, and it truly makes a difference in the success of our Agency.

Old Business:

There was no old business at this time.

New Business:

There was no new business at this time.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 27, 2025, at the Bureau County Metro Center, 837 Park Avenue West, Princeton, IL 61356.

The meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.