

**Tri-County Opportunities Council  
Board of Directors Meeting  
November 26, 2024**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:00 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)

Reed Akre, Sue Britt, Susan Bursztynsky, **Stephanie Foes, Al Harmon**, Marcia Heuer, **John Hockstadt, Tom Howes, Julie Jacobs**, Betty Johnson, Lisa Johnson, **Ron Kleppin**, Kenneth Krogulski, Brad Lindstrom, Linda Pennell, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, **David Torres, Marissa Trumper, Jeanne Vargas**, and Laura Watters.

**Members Absent:**

Charlotte Balensiefen, Robin Camplain, Mary Cork, Bernene Dahl, Kim Dahl, David Ditzler, Lynnae Garrett, BJ Holocker, Kristy Jones, Betsy Kinder, Sonjia Martin, Michael McEmery, Ginny McPerryman, Inga Neuner, Denise Russell, and Derek Whited.

**Others Present:**

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

**Minutes:**

The October 24, 2024, Board Minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the minutes, which Mr. Kleppin seconded. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Financial Report:**

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

**Personnel Committee Report:**

Mr. Harmon provided a report on the work completed by the Personnel Committee.

**President/CEO's Performance Appraisal and Compensation:**

Mr. Harmon aggregated the scores from the performance appraisals submitted by Board Officers and members of the Board Personnel Committee. The final performance appraisal was presented with a score of 4.95. Mr. Harmon stated that the personnel committee had a long discussion and was recommending to the full Board a 3.5% raise for Ms. Calkins, effective January 1, 2025. Mr.

Kleppin made a motion to approve the 3.5% wage increase, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

TCOC Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual:

Ms. Calkins shared and explained the changes made to the Paid Time Off policy. The revisions do not change the policy; they only make it clearer and more concise. The personnel committee recommends full board approval of the updated Paid Time Off policy in the Human Resource Policies and Procedures Manual. The revised manual, with the amended policy, will become effective on January 1, 2025. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the updated Paid Time-Off policy, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler**

Ms. Kanzler reported that the October ending book balance was \$5,975.52. As of October 31, 2024, \$409,688 was owed on the line of credit with Sauk Valley Bank.

She reminded the membership that since there is no December meeting, the November Financial Statements will be mailed in December to be accepted and filed for audit at the January 28, 2025 meeting.

She wished everyone a safe and joyful upcoming holidays and a healthy and prosperous new year.

**Program Reports:**

**Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts**

Ms. Watts welcomed Jessica Becker, CSBG Program Specialist, from the Office of Community Assistance. Jessica visited the main office the week prior for a 2024 monitoring review of the CSBG program.

She reported that funds are now available for the Department of Human Services Employment Barrier Reduction Program. This program is designed to provide supportive services to individuals enrolled in SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid and employed or actively seeking employment. She sought Board approval to accept \$230,000 from the Department of Human Services and the Illinois Association for Community Action Agencies to participate in the Employment Barrier Reduction program. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept \$230,000 for participation in the Employment Barrier Reduction program, and Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

She reminded the Board about programs available to help the unhoused population as the months get colder. She stated that from January until now, they have helped 66 households get into permanent housing. In addition, 296 were assisted by paying arrears to maintain their homes.

The new TCOC Service Hub is now operational and making a significant impact. At this location, there are two CSBG Outreach Workers, two LIHEAP Intake Workers, and an Early Head Start/Head Start PR Recruiter. They also look forward to adding a few Weatherization employees in the future. The Hub's

goal is to streamline the application process for customers, allowing them to apply for multiple services more efficiently.

With the end of the year approaching, Ms. Watts shared a few inspiring success stories that serve as an example and a testament to the program's significant impact over the past year.

**Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell**

FGP Director Brandi Newell reported that the Foster Grandparent volunteer ranks remain at fifty-two, with several still out due to extended illness.

Board packets included a copy of the AmeriCorps Seniors PIIA (Payment Integrity Information Act) results from this year. The process began in February and closed this month with no findings.

She reported that at the November FGP in-service, volunteers met Millie, the new Sterling Police Department therapy dog. Detectives also attended and shared insight on new scams targeting seniors in the area. Following a turkey luncheon, they tested their flexibility with chair yoga.

Last year, they introduced smartwatches to their volunteers in an effort to allow them to monitor important health information. The technology was received with enthusiasm. Because falls have been an ongoing problem with a few of their volunteers, they will have another chance to flex their technology muscles as they gift them with Amazon Echo devices this year. Volunteers will receive instructions on how they can use the technology to call for help if a phone is out of their reach. They look forward to enjoying the final in-service of the year with volunteers in December.

**Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain**

Ms. DeSpain sought Board approval to submit a continuation grant application for the Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The budget included in the grant will be for the program period of April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026, in the total amount of \$8,319,595. Of this amount, \$6,654,156 serves Head Start children (367), and \$1,665,439 serves Early Head Start pregnant women, infants, and toddlers (116). The grant application must be submitted via the Head Start Enterprise System by January 1, 2025. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the grant application submission, and Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

She next sought Board approval to submit a request to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for a waiver of non-federal funds for \$1,081,300 (65%) of the required match for the Head Start Program for the funding period April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026. This waiver request would be included in the Grant Application due before January 1, 2025. Mr. Howes made a motion to approve the submission of a waiver request for the Head Start non-federal funds for \$1,081,300. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, she sought Board approval to submit a request to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for a waiver of non-federal funds for \$270,634 (65%) of the required match for the Early Head Start Program for the funding period April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026. This waiver request would

be included in the Grant Application due before January 1, 2025. Mr. Howes made a motion to approve the submission of a waiver request for the Early Head Start non-federal funds for \$270,634. Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

She reported that after fourteen weeks of school, home visits, and settling into daily routines, the program remains focused on providing safe, supportive, and inclusive environments to those it serves and employs. Five classrooms remain unopened, and six home-visiting positions remain vacant. Current staff continues to fulfill the responsibilities associated with their positions and others.

On September 27, 2024, the program submitted its appeal of forced reduction and the recapturing of funds to the Administration for Children and Families. This appeal is specific to the Early Head Start program and notes the Administration's failure to use allowable flexibilities, remain transparent, and acknowledge the national staffing shortages plaguing educational institutions.

On Monday, November 25, 2024, two program parents, Ms. Garrett and Ms. Derossett, Mr. Harmon, Ms. Kanzler, Ms. Calkins, and Ms. DeSpain participated in the appeal hearing. The focus was on concerns regarding the lack of transparency, OHS messaging, allowable flexibilities outlined in the Head Start Act, lack of support from the Regional Office (Program Specialist), the positive improvements the program has made, and the program's need for additional time to redesign the program and submit a change of scope application. OHS has 30 days to respond.

Emphasis on locating, attending, and bringing awareness to Agency services during community events remains a top priority. Ms. DeSpain asked members to continue to offer any information regarding upcoming community events in their area.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided copies of the October 2024 Policy Council minutes, October Board Report, ACF-OHS-IM-24-04, ACF-OHS-PI-24-06, ACF-OHS-PI-24-07, ACF-OHS-IM-24-06, ACF-OHS-IM-24-06, ACF-OHS-IM-24-07, enrollment status report, and the non-federal in-kind donation sheet. She asked that members please encourage interested candidates to visit the Agency's website at [www.tcochelps.org](http://www.tcochelps.org) or call 1-800-323-5434. In conclusion, she reminded Board members to fill out the In-Kind/Volunteer sheet for any time spent reading over materials previously handed out.

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

Ms. Saenz stated that the LIHEAP department has entered 4,406 applications, and 2,106 have been fully processed with applicants receiving assistance. They have 35 furnace applications either completed or in the process.

ComEd and LIHEAP software issues are affecting application processing. Staff are working hard and overtime to keep applications moving.

She also reported that the Low-Income Discount Rates have affected recertifications in the PIPP program. Due to wrong billing amounts being generated, they cannot process them. This has put 700 households on hold until the problem is rectified.

**Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson**

Mr. Thompson stated that the 2024 Weatherization programs funded by HHS (Health & Human Services) and the State are complete. The Weatherization and fiscal Departments have completed the closeout process for these grants and have submitted them to DCEO (Dept of Commerce & Economic Opportunity) prior to the November 14 deadline.

They are wrapping up the work on the rental units at the Victor Meadows Senior Living Apartments in Princeton. The inspectors were there last week and created a punch list of items that need attention but nothing significant.

He also mentioned that they are continuing to work on setting up the new Weatherization system (IWX) for Weatherization applications, assessments, and work orders. The application portal is now active. Please refer all potential customers to our Agency's website. Under the Weatherization tab, a turquoise tab says "Apply On-Line." Customers can go to that site and complete their pre-application. Once complete, it will be reviewed by the program's office staff. When 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. Although all of the program's field staff, including Mr. Thompson, have been through the training for the new system, they continue to have issues with getting everything to work correctly. Mr. Thompson and one of his staff members visited the Freeport agency today as a DCEO Weatherization Specialist was there holding in-field training on the new system. They will continue to train and work with the system until they have it mastered.

**President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins**

Ms. Calkins thanked the Personnel Committee for completing her annual appraisal and recommending her compensation for 2025 to the full board.

Ms. Calkins reports that the only current Board vacancy is for Whiteside County, Category C, and a caucus is scheduled for December 11, 2024, to elect Darlene Hartmann to fill the vacancy.

A Planning/Evaluation Committee meeting is scheduled for December 13, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. to discuss the Board's self-evaluation results. The Personnel Committee will need to meet in January to discuss the 2025 Salary/Wage Classification by Position document.

Each year, the Agency reviews the Conflict of Interest Policy with the Board and key staff members who have the authority to purchase or approve purchases. Ms. Calkins brought copies of the Conflict of Interest Policy, a sign-off form, and a current vendor list. Those not in attendance will be mailed a copy of the documents. Members were asked to review the policy and the vendor list and complete the sign-

off document. Members should note any perceived or known conflicts of interest on the form. If a member is unaware of any conflicts of interest, they can simply write, “none.” Members were asked to return the completed sign-off sheet to Ms. Calkins.

Ms. Calkins informed the membership that the new online Board Member Orientation she has been working with IACAA has been developed. She will demonstrate the online tool at the January meeting and challenge current Board Members to complete it.

Lastly, Ms.Calkins wished the membership Happy Holidays! The Board will not meet again until January 2025.

**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 Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.