

Family Services Review Commission Meeting

MINUTES

December 10, 2008

8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon

HSB-252

Members present: Jessica Chanay, Diane Cohen-Alpert (by phone), Ellen Gradison, and Michael Ware (by phone)

DHS staff present: Vic Todd, Xochitl Esparza, and Nancy Sathrum

Members excused: Doreen Binder, Yesenia Gutierrez, and Peggy Kennerly

Members absent: Maggie Bagon, Kim Freeman

Guests: Sherry Burrell, DHS, Tawna Sanchez, NAYA Family Center

Meeting materials sent via email prior to meeting: Meeting Agenda, Draft Minutes of the November 6, 2008 FSRC Meetings, Updated Family Services Review Commission Members List, September 2008 TANF Re-engagement Review, 2009 FSRC Meeting Schedule, DHS Key Performance Measures, October 2008 Summary and Complaint and Discrimination Narrative Reports, October 2008 Self Sufficiency at a glance, and October 2008 CAF Public Assistance Caseloads

Greeting and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 a.m. without a quorum in attendance.

Chair Report:

- Meeting agenda was reviewed and Jessica asked the group for any changes. Ellen will ask Yesenia to send Nancy a paragraph summary of the December 4th Client Services Committee meeting. Ellen suggested that we begin the next FSRC meeting with recruitment issues.
- Re-engagement review: Jessica asked FSRC for their thoughts on the re-engagement review report
- Approval of November 6, 2008 Meeting Minutes: No quorum in attendance; table to January 2009 meeting.

DHS Report: Vic Todd and Xochitl Esparza

Vic and Xochitl joined the meeting at 8:50 a.m. Current food stamp caseload information shows an increase of 4,300 cases over last month. The economy and outreach are contributing to this increase. Within the Self-Sufficiency (SSP) portion of the food stamp population, there are 189,779 households. The balance is within Seniors and People with Disabilities (SPD) with 73,138 households.

Also, of the TANF caseload increase, 90% of the increase is people entering the two-parent program, reflecting the weak economy. The Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) would remove the 2-parent household benefits entirely. This issue will be part of larger discussions during the upcoming legislative session when the state legislature will make funding decisions that will affect DHS programs.

Re-engagement Review. DHS is using the latest review, done by field staff, as a mechanism for staff to improve their efforts to re-engage clients. The number of sanctioned cases increased to 168 during the past six months but the numbers are beginning to decline. The reviews will move to a semi-annual schedule rather than a periodic review. This is being done to improve the level of feedback for staff and managers so changes can be put in place as needed. FSRC members are pleased that DHS plans to begin reviewing cases on a regular basis to provide more immediate feedback to field staff. The report to the FSRC will continue every six months. Re-engagement reviews are showing cases with multiple issues: time limits, workload pressures, and insufficient documentation. When sanctions are removed, retroactive benefits are distributed.

The DHS rebalance plan did not request funding to backfill the 7.4 million projected shortfall, which means SSP will have to reduce services for the remainder of the biennium.

The current caseload estimates from the field are higher than initial projections. DHS needs to find a balance with respect to minimizing the delay in eligibility determinations while also doing case management for TANF. Vic said the food stamp bonuses received this year are being partially used to fund 60 new staff members approved during the DHS rebalance. These are limited-duration positions that will begin in April 2009 (20 in April, 20 in May and 20 in June, 2009; all positions will end June 30, 2009.) The intention is to find a way to continue the new positions. The Transformation and RPI process may help reduce time needed on cases.

The current budget situation means a reduced capacity to provide services. Clients are being diverted from pre-TANF and put on regular TANF right away which doesn't help clients with past expenses. The FSRC asked if this was an intentional decision. It was not intentional, but caseworkers may be doing this on their own. DHS is trying to hold on to the intent of the programs by making reductions, rather than eliminating programs in case additional funds are secured in the future. Family Support and Connections program is being held flat. District/Branches will have waiting lists for this program. The FSRC mentioned that the average client generally doesn't know what is available to them or how to ask for it.

Last week's E-board meeting included three major items in re-balance:

1. \$7.4 million shortage discussed.
2. Reduced Post-TANF monthly payments from \$150 to \$100 effective February 1, 2009. DHs will give a 20-calendar day notice to clients. Senator Bates said this should be

reviewed at the beginning of session to see if funding can be re-established because the cuts will likely cause clients to return to TANF.

3. Districts continue to develop their local plans and are ranking services and working with contracts to re-allocate budgets according to the increase in mandatory clients.

ACTION: Vic/Xochitl will send local plans to FSRC when available. Xochitl will provide information on the core activities that were defined by the feds.

DHS also discussed the potential for a Federal stimulus package. They are looking for assistance with the Medicaid match and an increase in food stamps. Food stamps and medical have federal match rate or full federal participation, which is not true with TANF; it makes sense to also have TANF stimulus package to help states meet the need for services.

FSRC Discussion:

- Michael reported that there has been a big impact on their anti-poverty programs; with increased calls for help with rent and utility bills. Federal funds have been increased over the past quarter but they received 130 applications for 30 slots.
- Tawna reported that NAYA (Native American Youth Association) is getting many calls for housing and emergency rent assistance. Because of limited funds and grants, they refer callers to other resources in the community. Clients are calling back that they haven't found help. It is important to document requests for emergency housing assistance and other services.

Discussion Items:

- Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB): The GRB is the first step in the budget process. It includes some positive items with regarding increases in health care coverage and education but also contains proposed reductions that would negatively impact low-income families. During session the FSRC should send letters or testify in person at hearings and include clients if they are available to testify.
- E-Board Presentation: Jessica and Jon Stubenvol from the Oregon Food Bank shared with the E-Board three main points: 1) protect the safety net -- it is the worst possible time to reduce services to families in need, 2) assisting low-income families is a form of economic stimulus for local communities, and 3) don't withhold funding now that will cost more in the long run; i.e., it is more expensive to help homeless families after they have lost their homes than it is to help them stay housed. The E-Board seemed to be responsive to these points. Senator Bates said they don't want to repeat actions of the 2003 session. We are facing an unprecedented recession and it will be important to speak as a commission on the above 3 points because of the competing priorities for limited revenues. **ACTION: Nancy to send out list of legislators. (Done 12/10/08.)**
- Jessica will contact Rep. Kotek about changing the statute to include the appointment of a state representative and senator to the FSRC. Questions: Would they be included in the current 16 members or would the number expand to 18? Would they be voting members? **ACTION: Jessica will send language via email for review.**

- Sherrie met with “Bridges to Housing” community agencies in the Portland area. It is important that community social service workers write letters and speak out about the needs they see in the field. She will connect with Jessica to provide information and develop a cheat sheet on how to contact and provide information to legislators. It would be helpful to collect contact information on community partners who are willing to testify and/or write letters. Coordinating information-sharing strategies will increase our effectiveness. Sherrie has an email group available for sharing information. **ACTION: Jessica will send out information.**
- Michael asked if DHS has a list of community partners. Availability of information most likely depends on the district. **ACTION: Lists should be requested through Jim Neely in CAF Field Services.**
- Tawna suggested starting by sending information to FSRC members for outreach to their contacts in the social services arena to hit networks that people in need go to for assistance. Jessica suggested tapping into the Human Services Coalition of Oregon (HSCO).
- **ACTION: Above discussions will continue on email to create a list for information sharing. Develop cheat sheet on how to contact legislators and testify.**

Client Services Committee Meeting Summary: Diane provided a summary of the last Client Services Committee meeting which included a brainstorm session. Sherrie is setting up six focus groups in the Multnomah County area to look at ways to draw on line staff to do a focus group or survey monkey (to be discussed at next meeting). Input and suggestions to brainstorming are encouraged. Ellen suggested that the most recent version of the Client Complaint Form be sent out to FSRC members. Sherrie should have the new form within the next few days. Get in touch with Yesenia or Diane if you have questions. One item discussed was recruiting more members and looking at different categories of members who aren't currently represented.

DHS Key Performance Measures (KPM)

An email was sent to members for input. DHS is setting up KPMs for 2009-11 biennium to deal with program areas throughout the department. Jessica requested extension to Friday, 12/12/08. Ellen felt the FSRC may not want to spend a lot of time on this chart because we don't know much about how it is used and the timeframe is short. The Client Services Committee may want to recommend something as they continue their work. It was suggested that A DHs representative be invited to visit an FSRC meeting to discuss the performance measures; what they are used for, how they pertain to CAF, statutory requirements, baselines, etc. After the presentation, FSRC can determine how to respond to assist DHS.

ACTION: Jessica will see if this is the only time we can provide input. Jessica asked FSRC members to comment individually to DHS by Friday, December 12.

Ellen mentioned the Medicaid Advisory has a data sub-group that reviews what data is needed. She will report back to the FSRC on how that is working.

FSRC Recruitment

Tawna is with us today and will be submitting her application to the Governor's office. Jessica will submit a request to the Governor's office to change categories on Yesenia and Ellen. Tawna could fit into the former recipient category.

Possible recruitments were discussed.

ACTION: FSRC members were asked to pursue possible leads for new membership. Yesenia has prospects from A&D and DV services, and Ellen and Jessica have others that they will follow-up with. Jessica will pursue getting legislators on board.

Future Agenda Items:

-- Discuss recruitment early in meeting.

Next Meeting: The next FSRC meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2008, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon in Room 252 of the Human Services Building.

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.