

DeKalb County Government  
Sycamore, Illinois

**Health & Human Services Committee Minutes  
August 7, 2023**

The Health & Human Services Committee of the DeKalb County Board met on Monday, August 7, 2023, in the Legislative Center's Gathertorium in Sycamore, Illinois. Chair Rukisha Crawford called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Those members present were Meryl Domina, Joseph Marcinkowski, Michelle Pickett, Chris Porterfield, Amber Quitno, and Chair Rukisha Crawford. Savannah Ilenikhena was absent. A quorum was established with six members present and one absent. Others present included Dekalb County Rehab and Nursing Center (DCRNC) Administrator Bart Becker, Regional Superintendent Amanda Christensen, County Administrator Brian Gregory, Administrative Analyst Liam Sullivan, and County Board Chair Suzanne Willis. Jordan Healthcare representatives Tom Annarella and Andrew Cutler attended the meeting remotely. Savannah Ilenikhena arrived at 6:31 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Chris Porterfield moved to approve the agenda as presented. Joseph Marcinkowski seconded the motion and the motion was approved.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Meryl Domina moved to approve the minutes of the June 5, 2023 committee meeting and Michelle Pickett seconded the motion and the motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Anna Wilhelmi expressed concern regarding the delay in obtaining the Certificate of Need for the sale of the DCRNC and questioned the County Board on the DCRNC's viability, as she feels closing the facility is not an option.

Madeline Nelson emphasized the commitment the county has kept over the years in maintaining a high quality nursing home and she expressed concern over statistics that show that nursing home management by for-profit entities correlates to substandard resident care. She added that the potential buyers of the DCRNC have a record of operating nursing homes with low ratings. She commented that the DCRNC's current financial situation appears to be viable and that the center should be preserved as a not-for-profit facility.

Nikki Marsh expressed concern over voters being denied the opportunity to decide on a referendum to support the DCRNC. She outlined several questions for Brian Gregory regarding the financial management of the DCRNC, the lack of insurance contracts that restricts the facility's ability to increase revenue, not opening the center's Transitional Care Unit and reducing the number of resident admissions. She added that studies show for-profit nursing homes have a higher mortality rate and outlined her concern with the decision to sell to a questionable buyer.

Carol Deemer explained that she and her family have lived in DeKalb County for many years and that she is against the sale of the DCRNC to a for-profit company. She outlined the research she has done on the buyers and is concerned with the low ratings their facilities have and that they did not disclose all the homes that they own. She asked the County Board members if they researched the buyers and offered hard-copy documentation of the research she had gathered. She emphasized that she does not want to see the center sold and stated that there are many people in the community that care and want to help and that she believes a positive solution can be found.

Kathy Perilongo stated that she is a 40-year employee of the DCRNC and that she worked on the campaign to save the nursing home in the 1990s. She added that during that time, the County Board put the issue into the hands of the voters and she asked why the decision to sell wasn't put on the ballot this time.

Abdul El Gamal outlined that he is a current resident of the DCRNC and that he is very concerned about the future health and safety of the DCRNC residents if the nursing home is sold to Saba. He stated that Saba has historically mismanaged nursing homes and that this mismanagement has resulted in substandard care of residents. He emphasized that DCRNC residents are fearful that their home will become unsafe and that they will suffer under Saba's management.

## **PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS**

### **Regional Office of Education's Annual Report**

Regional Superintendent Amanda Christensen explained that the annual report is still being prepared, as their fiscal year ended June 30<sup>th</sup> and data has not been finalized. She stated she will provide as much information as possible and that there are several areas of the report in which the data is not yet available.

Amanda Christensen stated that she is very pleased to have remained in her position as Regional Superintendent. She outlined that the Regional Office of Education (ROE) partners with schools, superintendents, and school boards to serve the community. Amanda Christensen added that she has been very busy during her eleven years of service in seeking and obtaining grant funding in support of community objectives. She explained that the ROE serves as an intermediary for the local school districts and the Illinois State Board of Education.

Amanda Christensen reviewed other key functions of her office including licensure and assisting districts in identifying individual educator qualifications for position assignments, training for school bus drivers, conducting district compliance audits, and providing assistance to substitute teachers. She added that schools are in great need of substitutes.

Amanda Christensen stated that the ROE serves as the county liaison for students that are homeless and provides necessary support to ensure consistent school attendance. She outlined that there are approximately 300 students that are classified as homeless every year.

Amanda Christensen stated that the Kishwaukee Education Consortium (KEC) provides alternative education to students who have multiple suspensions or an expulsion. She added that the KEC also serves as the Career Technical Education Center.

Amanda Christensen reviewed that the ROE Professional Development consultants provide services to educators and secretaries. She explained that there were two new programs that the ROE launched last year. Amanda Christensen outlined that the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) provides a portal that enables a formalized referral system across many agencies that partners individuals with resources. She stated that Developmental Assets for Youth Success (DAYS) allows multiple agencies to work collaboratively, share resources, increase communication, and promote developmental assets.

Amanda Christensen outlined that truancy numbers continue to rise and that the ROE has worked with schools to improve truancy reporting. In responding to a question from a committee member, Amanda Christensen mentioned that schools must make the initial truancy referral and that it's important to identify the truancy as early as possible.

Amanda Christensen mentioned that there is a shortage of educators and in particular, a shortage of early childhood educators. She added that the ROE is helping to address the shortage by funding clubs for students who are interested in becoming educators. Amanda Christensen stated that the funds for this program are available through a state grant.

Amanda Christensen reviewed that the DeKalb County "Basics" program promotes simple and powerful ways to interact with young children to build a strong foundation of learning. She stated that the program has been so effective locally that her team has been asked to lead the program at the state level. Amanda Christensen added that this is great validation of her staff and their commitment to programming for young children.

### **DeKalb County Rehab and Nursing Center (DCRNC) Operational Update**

DCRNC Administrator Bart Becker provided an operational update for the DCRNC and stated that the center's star rating remains at a 3 overall. He outlined that an unfortunate incident that occurred at the DCRNC in June will adversely affect the star rating.

Bart Becker reviewed that Kishwaukee Community Hospital staff toured the DCRNC in June and that the center continues to have a good relationship with the hospital. He outlined that there have been no COVID-19 cases since April. Bart Becker reviewed that the DCRNC's use of agency staffing continues to decline, and he complimented the Director of Nursing and Assistant Director of Nursing for their efforts in hiring nurses and certified nursing assistants, which has resulted in a reduced need for agency staffing. Bart Becker added that the objective is to eliminate use of agency staffing and that to accomplish this goal, the DCRNC must offer a more competitive salary. Following a question from a committee member regarding steps needed to become more competitive, Bart Becker responded that a wage survey should be conducted to assist in determining potential salary adjustments. He added that he feels current wages are close to the

target and reminded the committee that the DCRNC offers a limited benefits option with a higher hourly wage.

Bart Becker stated that Jordan Healthcare continues to assist in efforts to collect on past due accounts. He outlined that in his role as the DCRNC Administrator, his primary focus is to provide high quality care to residents, followed by ensuring the facility remains financially viable, and providing continued employment opportunities for the staff. He added that he feels the facility's operation is heading in the right direction and mentioned that increasing the number of Medicare patients and raising the private pay rate would assist in bringing in more revenue.

Bart Becker explained that patient referrals to the DCRNC are limited because the center does not have contracts with many of the insurance companies. He said that year to date, the DCRNC has lost out on at least 121 potential admissions due to a lack of contract. Brian Gregory added that the language in the sale agreement dictates that the DCRNC must have the approval of the buyer before they can enter into any contract. A committee member inquired about how long the contract process would potentially take and Andrew Cutler of Jordan Healthcare stated that it would be a two-month process at minimum. He outlined that the initial directive from the county was to focus on receivables. Following a committee member inquiry, Andrew Cutler stated that any contracts secured prior to the sale should be assignable to the new operator and if not, the new operator could obtain their own contracts.

Andrew Cutler mentioned that many of the employees and residents are choosing to stay with the DCRNC and that this is evidence of strong support for the center. He stated that prior DCRNC management had plenty of opportunity to address financial concerns and that in some cases, the center was not billing and/or not getting paid for services and then ran out of time to bill and was not able to collect what was owed.

A committee member asked if the DCRNC is viable and Bart Becker responded that it is. Andrew Cutler said that a better question is to ask how much more money will it take to stop the center from hemorrhaging cash, as there was another \$185k loss recorded in July. He added that the center may be functionally viable, but it will need support to get there. He outlined that obtaining contracts with healthcare companies would be a good move however, contracts will take a minimum of two months to secure and perhaps longer, depending on how willing the organizations are to work with the DCRNC. He added that the DCRNC may not secure every contract it targets. He added that getting control of costs is just as important as raising revenue, but that the center does need more revenue and admission options.

Brian Gregory stated that Jordan Healthcare will begin the process of pursuing contracts with insurance companies. He added that in his dialogue with Andrew Cutler, they discussed the impressive improvement the DCRNC has made, in terms of overall financial management. The committee thanked the DCRNC staff for their efforts and commitment.

Bart Becker stated that the billing arrangement with DeKalb Township should be reviewed, as townships are billed for their patients and DeKalb remits a flat rate each month that has not covered their expense. Brian Gregory stated that he will research what intergovernmental agreement may be in place with DeKalb Township.

Brian Gregory reviewed the circumstances that resulted in the incompleteness of the Transitional Care Unit.

Sue Willis reviewed County Board action in selecting Illuminate and then discovering months later that individuals from Saba had partnered with Illuminate. She outlined prior County Board considerations in putting a DCRNC referendum on the ballot and reviewed that the resolution did not pass.

**OLD BUSINESS**

There were no old business items.

**NEW BUSINESS**

There were no new business items.

**ADJOURNMENT**

It was moved by Savannah Ilinekhena and seconded by Chris Porterfield to adjourn the meeting. The motion was carried, and the meeting adjourned at 8:57pm.

Respectfully submitted by Chris Klein, Recording Secretary