

Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

MEETING	Wednesday, August 5, 2026 4:00 pm -6:00 pm
ATTENDEES	Gloria Blevins, Bianca Crawford, Verna Darby, Jacqueline Fletcher (DCFS), Delaney Jones, Veranda Rodgers, Daniel Smith, Karen Stormann (DCFS), Lakecia Wild Guests – Tisha Barnes (Cleveland Documenters), David Merriman (HHS Director)
MINUTES	Available Online –Deborah Barber will post minutes upon approval
RECORDER	Deborah Barber

AGENDA ITEMS

	Introduction and Welcome
Minutes will be posted on the DCFS Advisory Board website	• Bianca Crawford opened the meeting • Call to Order and Introductions • Public Comment - None • Motion to accept meeting minutes from June 3, 2026 • Lakecia Wild– 1st • Daniel Smith– 2nd • Minutes Approved
	Public Comment
	Human Services Levy Update – David Merriman David Merriman provided an update on the levy approved by County Council for the November 2026 ballot . Key Points: • Levy represents a renewal with 2.5-mil increase to the existing 4.7-mil levy (correction later confirmed). • Would generate \$111 million annually for the next decade. • Funding is needed due to: ○ Increased residential care costs ○ Reductions in SNAP, Medicaid, senior services, & universal pre-K ○ Ohio’s low child-welfare funding ranking (49th of 50 states) ○ High reliance on local dollars • Child welfare is a mandated service; demand cannot be declined. If Levy Fails: • Agency enters deficit by next year. • Cuts projected: \$14M–\$30M.

	• Hiring freeze continues; caseloads rise. • Stabilization plan would require deeper reductions. • Next levy attempt possible May 2027, revenue delayed until January 2028. Board Follow-Up: • Requested guidance on how to support community awareness. • Asked where public can learn more (website/social media to launch soon). • Staff cannot advocate while on duty; may only share factual information. Levy Correction – David Merriman • Levy increase confirmed as 2.5 mils added to 4.7 mil levy.
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Guest Presentation - Deputy U.S. Marshal Jordan Fisher – Operation Meridian	
	Overview: • Statewide operation locating missing children throughout Ohio. • 200–300 missing children in Northern Ohio; 300–350 in Southern Ohio. • Most cases involve endangered runaway teens. Challenges Identified: • Youth who enter and quickly leave DCFS custody are not always re-entered into NCIC, preventing immediate case work. • Marshal Fisher requested: ○ Faster police report filing ○ Immediate re-entry of each missing child ○ Clearer coordination when youth go AWOL DCFS Response: • Acknowledged occasional processing delays. • Emphasized strong partnerships with Marshals, Cleveland PD, and Sheriff’s Office. • Noted challenges related to youth trauma and limited specialized housing options. Community Support: • Tip line promoted by Fox 8. • Public encouraged to report tips to local police or the U.S. Marshals. • Public listings available via Ohio Attorney General and NCMEC.

Director's Report – Jacqueline Fletcher	
	Staffing - County hiring freeze remains in place. - DCFS approved to onboard 12 new Child Protection Specialists. - Expanded training schedule underway; additional interviews ongoing. Youth Graduation Celebration - CSU hosted celebration for 66 DCFS youth graduates (high school & college). - Highlights included: - Attendance by leadership, juvenile court magistrate - Violin performance by youth - Director reiterated importance of long-term “village” support for youth aging out. Respite Services - Respite remains a major need across the state. - Current DCFS respite resources serve foster caregivers only. - Partnering with Safe Families for Children for community-based respite options. - Board encouraged to share additional resource leads. Board Question: Could contracted respite providers serve biological families? DCFS: Not currently permitted under contract terms but open to future discussion.

Subcommittee Reports	
	Governance Update Reported by Bianca Crawford: - Upcoming term completions: Gabriela Celeste, David Crampton, Andrew Garner, Lakeisha Wild. - Recruitment needed; application link sent to members. - Orientation improvements planned for new and current members. - Emphasis on preserving board advocacy legacy. - Continued request for Canopy data. - Subcommittee leadership needed for: Intervention Subcommittee Prevention Subcommittee Intervention Subcommittee Report - Focused on developing a clear definition of respite for Cuyahoga County. - Respite seen as both a prevention and intervention tool.

	• Case Western provided initial research support. • Members will return with definitions and data at next meeting. Prevention Subcommittee Report Reported by Delaney Jones: • Reviewed medical child protection team updates (data pending). • Respite recognized as shared priority. • Case scenario discussion raised key question: Does DCFS formally collect feedback from frontline staff on barriers to keeping kids safe? DCFS will evaluate current processes and explore collaborative solutions.
	10. Additional Discussion • DCFS hiring link remains on county website; full-time positions only. • No dashboard presentation this session due to time.

Updates	
Motivated & Empowered – Bianca	• Awarded contract under Every Child Needs a Village initiative. • Community listening and training tour launching to support foster/kinship recruitment. • Shared statewide data: ○ 14,000 children in custody ○ 4,200 statewide bed shortage • Capital budget awarded to build: ○ 14 respite beds ○ 25 housing units for teen mothers and youth aging out • Mentor rally scheduled: ○ 152 youth registered ○ Only ~20 mentors; more urgently needed
RX Kids – Delaney	• Cleveland implementing RX Kids beginning in September. • Provides: ○ \$1500 during pregnancy ○ \$500/month for first six months postpartum

- Flint program resulted in reduced infant maltreatment reports.
- Provider training scheduled this month.

12. Sunshine Law Reminder

Virtual attendees must keep cameras on throughout public meetings.

[Next Meeting:](#) August 5, 2026, 4:00pm – 6:00 PM

Location – County Headquarters, 2079 E 9th St., Room A, Cleveland, OH 44115