

Human Services

BOL Meeting Minutes - Published Draft



Committee Chair: Nancy Barr

800 Michaelian Office Bldg.
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor
White Plains, NY 10601
www.westchesterlegislators.com

Tuesday, July 8, 2025

10:00 AM

Committee Room

CALL TO ORDER

Please note: Meetings of the Board of Legislators and its committees are held at the Michaelian Office Building, 148 Martine Avenue, White Plains, New York, 10601, and remotely via the WebEx video conferencing system. Legislators may participate in person or via Webex. Members of the public may attend meetings in person at any of its locations, or view it online on the Westchester County Legislature's website: <https://westchestercountyny.legistar.com/> This website also provides links to materials for all matters to be discussed at a given meeting.

Chair Barr called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM

Present: Legislator Barr and Legislator Williams Johnson

Absent: Legislator Alvarado, Legislator Pierce and Legislator Woodson-Samuels

MINUTES APPROVAL

I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A presentation by the Department of Social Services regarding the success of the Family First Program

Guests:

Department of Social Services

Deputy Commissioner John Befus

Deputy Commissioner Lizette Matos

This meeting addressed the Department of Social Service's approach to foster care which is the Family First Program. The guests discussed their progress in improving child welfare through community partnerships, and youth involvement. In the last five years, the mission statement has been built upon by the leadership of Commissioner Townes. A new vision prioritizes social justice and equity within the department's mission to support vulnerable populations.

Commissioner Befus provided some history of the Westchester County Foster Care system by highlighting the drastic drops in population and costs associated with foster care from 2008 to 2023. The department has been able to leverage the savings in reduced foster care to reinvest in community preventive care. There are about 6500 reports of abuse and neglect each year and preventative services are provided through those reinvestments for about 1200 children and their families. Partnerships with community organizations enhanced preventative services

and reduced institutional care for children. The guests also mentioned several initiatives which consist of a system of collaborative care. The incorporation of youth voices through programs like Bravehearts informs improvements in child welfare practices. The department also hosts ongoing training initiatives to address domestic violence and aim to engage fathers in child welfare processes. The meeting discussed coordination among over 500 community providers and 650 contracts for service improvement.

Foster care placements increased by 6%, indicating a growing need for support and resources. Limited availability of residential mental health programs contributes to children entering foster care with complex needs. Kinship care placements have risen significantly, now comprising nearly 50% of foster care cases. Ongoing challenges exist in recruiting traditional foster parents, particularly for teens and special needs children.

The conversation continued by discussing the importance of mental health and the foster care system, challenges in social services and housing as it relates to child welfare. For the full presentation please reach out to slpc@westchestercountyny.gov.

II. OTHER BUSINESS

III. RECEIVE & FILE

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:01 AM.