Date: Wednesday, August 28, 2024
Time: 1:30 PM
Location: Commissioners Conference Room 247, 200 W Oak Street

BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES MINUTES

This meeting was recorded, broadcast online and archived.

Introduction and Announcements

- Commissioner John Kefalas, Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally, Commissioner Kristin Stephens, County Manager Lorenda Volker, Assistant County Manager Laurie Kadrich, Human Economic Heath Director Laura Walker, Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre, Division Managers Jill Maasch, Lori Metz, Thad Paul, Deputy Division Manager Katie Heckman, Social Caseworker Manager Deb DeLuca-Forzley and Business Operations Coordinator Kalene Rowley.

Supported Families Stronger Community Grant Update - Thad Paul, Katie Heckman, Deb DeLuca-Forzely

Link to Presentation: SFSC Presentation

- SFSC is a child welfare prevention project funded with a 5 year (2019-2024) grant. The main goal of the grant was to reduce child maltreatment in our community, approaching the issue from multiple angles. We focused on two key strategies: first, providing early intervention and support to families to prevent child abuse before it occurs by building trust with the family; and second, helping our community partners understand the available options to assist families so they can address issues before needing to involve child welfare services by increasing collaboration.
- It's common for our partners and others in the community to see a family in need and consider calling the hotline or child protection services. However, we know that, despite the dedication of those working in child protection, this may not always be the best or first option for referring a family to services. There are often other resources and supports that might be more appropriate for addressing the family's needs.

- We have established a bi-monthly navigation meeting as part of our partnerships. This community-wide event is designed to discuss and improve how we serve families together. Our team hosts these meetings, but they involve participation from various community partners.
- Colorado State University's School Social Work Research Center is involved in tracking outcomes and evaluating the impact of the grant.
- We have four community navigators, who are referred to as 'navigators.' Their role is to meet families in the community at locations of the families' choosing. This could be at their home, in a park, at a coffee shop, or any other place where the family feels comfortable.
- The community navigators will assist with anything the family needs. We have bilingual navigators who can assist in languages such as Arabic and Spanish, addressing the fact that many forms are not available in these languages and can be confusing. The navigators will work directly with families to ensure they understand and accurately fill out applications for benefits or services.
- We also consider the best methods for meeting with families. Our navigators use various tools such as texting, phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings. The approach is tailored to what works best for each family. We ask families for their preferences on how they would like to communicate and be served, and we adapt to meet their needs effectively.
- As of June 2024, we have received 720 referrals to the team. Out of these, 627 referrals were assigned to the team with 559 being successfully contacted.
- As of the end of June 2024 this team has made over 4,000 referrals to community resources through our partner agencies involved in this project. This number reflects only the agencies participating in this project and does not include the entire community. The fact that we have so many referrals exchanged between partners highlights the effectiveness of our collaboration.
- We do not consider immigration status, so undocumented families can receive help. Additionally, families do not need to have an active child welfare assessment or case. These criteria allow us to provide support to a wide range of families in need. To be eligible for our services, families simply need to live in Larimer County and have a child under the age of 18.
- The project utilizes the second edition of the Protective Factors Survey. We chose this survey because it is family-friendly and focuses on strengths. It helps us understand what support families need and guides us in assisting them as they navigate resources in our community.

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- We're excited to share that we have about a 75% engagement rate with the referrals we receive. Our engagement numbers exceed those of most other programs, which we attribute to various factors, including our ongoing communication and collaboration with state partners and prevention programs.
- On slide #8, the blue bars represent the average Protective Factors score. When a navigator completes the survey with a family, the family rates themselves in each category. A lower score indicates a greater need for assistance or desire for support in that area. The gray bars show the average number of referrals to services made for each Protective Factor.
- What's important to note here is that we are effectively connecting families with the resources they are requesting. The data shows that 'concrete support,' which includes needs like rent, housing, and transportation, is a major need in our community. Families are consistently identifying these as their top priorities.
- In the Protective Factors Survey, we are observing an increase in scores for the protective factors as families work with the navigators. Notably, there are significant improvements in social supports and concrete supports over time. While family functioning and resilience are also improving, the changes are not yet statistically significant but are trending in that direction.
- On slide #10, each line represents a different family, and we combine all the lines to create the overall view. On the left side of the graph, you see data from before any interaction with the navigators, and on the right side, you see data after the interaction. This includes all types of engagement, whether through community connections, high-intensity, or low-intensity services. The graph shows a downward trend in the likelihood of a child protection assessment after families have engaged with our program. This means that, following their involvement with our navigators, families are less likely to require a child protection assessment.
- In relation to their evaluation research for the grant, CSU is conducting a study across different zip codes to evaluate the impact of our program. Early indications suggest that they are observing statistically significant differences in our program's effectiveness compared to similar programs in other counties. This level of impact is promising and suggests that our program may be suitable for publication in peer-reviewed journals.
- We wanted to bring this to your attention to recognize the outstanding work of this team as the grant comes to a close. Their efforts are truly cutting-edge, and you'll see this reflected in the research we'll share with you once it's finalized.
- We have included a request in our county budget submission to continue funding this team while we continue to work with the state on a strategic approach to funding prevention efforts.

Questions/Answers

- In reference to the Supported Families Stronger Community Grant, Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally highlighted that there should be long-term cost savings from this initiative, as it directs individuals to the right intervention at the right time, potentially reducing future expenses and improving outcomes.
    - Division Manager Thad Paul responded that while the CSU research doesn't specifically include cost savings analysis, we are evaluating the general cost savings of prevention interventions. We will have some figures to share at the end of the project. Additionally, there is historical data on the cost per assessment and cost per case from previous workload studies conducted at the state level.

      The key to understanding cost savings will be comparing the trajectory of families involved in our program to those in the child welfare system. This comparison will help us estimate the potential cost savings. However, this analysis may not reach the level of detail needed for publishable research.

- Commissioner Kristen Stephens agreed that this is an excellent program and commended the remarkable work done. She noted that preventing child abuse is a priority for everyone in the county. Given that the grant was $2.75 million over five years, which averages to about $550,000 per year, she asked if this is the anticipated funding needed to sustain the program. Additionally, she inquired about the program's scalability. Specifically, she wanted to know if it could be adapted or scaled down if the full amount of funding isn't available. Although budget discussions are not currently underway, she emphasized the importance of advocating to the State for continued support, highlighting that this approach is a best practice in prevention.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre responded by noting that Thad Paul, Deb DeLuca-Forzley, and Katie Heckman have been actively advocating for this program at both the State and national levels, presenting it wherever opportunities arise. Discussions are ongoing from last year's legislative interim committee, and there is growing interest at the state level in implementing a statewide warm line similar to this program. However, further discussions are needed regarding funding and scalability.

  Other counties are also exploring this approach and pushing the state to support it. Additionally, there are efforts underway to develop a long-term funding model for child welfare, which includes prevention services. The Child Welfare Allocation Committee is working on this and aims to finalize their recommendations by spring, with a plan to drive allocations starting in the 2025-2026 fiscal year. While progress is being made, the pace is slower than desired, and the final outcome will depend on the state's budget decisions.

- Division Manager Thad Paul shared that we are exploring the potential to secure Medicaid funding for the program, as it involves care coordination and serves a population with significant Medicaid enrollment. Recent data shows that 80% of those involved with the program are on SNAP and Medicaid. Thad noted that while TANF numbers are lower, there are opportunities to expand support through Medicaid.
- Commissioner John Kefalas requested more information about the Protective Factor Survey. He wanted to understand the methodology behind the survey, including how the decision was made to use this particular tool. He is interested in gaining a deeper understanding of its application and effectiveness.
    - Social Caseworker Manager Deb DeLuca-Forzley explained that the protective factor survey being used is the second edition, developed by a group in Kansas. This survey focuses on identifying strengths rather than weaknesses, unlike tools such as the ACE survey, which emphasize risk factors. The protective factor survey is strength-based and designed to be straightforward and quick to administer. It uses a simple scoring system from 0 to 4, where 0 indicates a lack of strength in a particular area and 4 indicates a strong presence of that strength. The survey is reliable, validated, and widely used across the country. The team chose this tool because it is effective, easy to understand, and does not place a heavy burden on either the administrators or the participants.
- Commissioner John Kefalas asked if it comes in multiple languages.
    - Social Caseworker Manager Deb DeLuca-Forzley confirmed that the navigators translated it to make it effective in multiple languages.
- Division Manager Thad Paul emphasized that the protective factor survey is closely linked to social determinants of health. It serves as a well-being tool for families, addressing various aspects of their overall health and stability. While child welfare focuses on well-being, safety, and permanency, measuring well-being is particularly challenging.
- Commissioner John Kefalas raised concerns about the potential end of funding at the end of September and thanked the team for exploring options to sustain the program. He emphasized the importance of preparing for a worst-case scenario where the program might not continue. He asked how the team would support families if the navigators could no longer provide their services. He urged them to

consider contingency plans and budgetary strategies to ensure families continue to receive support, even if the program cannot be sustained.
- Division Manager Thad Paul explained that despite the funding ending in September, the program will continue to support families until the end of the calendar year, allowing them to complete their work with current families without interruption.
- Commissioner John Kefalas asked whether the navigators receive any level of training, considering not all of them may have formal social work degrees or similar qualifications.
- Social Caseworker Manager Deb DeLuca-Forzley confirmed that the navigators do receive training, including in motivational interviewing techniques.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre confirmed that once the research is completed, it will be shared with the board.

Fiscal Update- Heather O'Hayre

Link to Presentation: Human Services Financial Report

- Every August, we provide an update on funding. Most of our funding streams operate on the state fiscal year, running July 1st-June 30th. This report reflects that transition and differs from previous reports. Typically, we provided a two- or three-page document with red and green numbers, representing the closeout of the prior year. For this update, we've changed the report format and included specific numbers for the upcoming year. This should make it easier to see the changes from one year to the next. We welcome any feedback you might have on this new format. The report will proceed in alphabetical order.
- **Adult Protective Services (APS):** In the report, the top portion shows the closeout of the previous state fiscal year, while the bottom table presents the funding for the current state fiscal year. Director Heather O'Hayre highlighted her concern with this program due to federal/ state funding not increasing accordingly with the overall growth of this population and their needs. We continue to experience overspending in this area.
- The state overall continues to face overspending issues, and there is currently no strategic plan to address this. APS is a top budget priority for the Colorado Human Services Directors Association. The issue is primarily driven by the lack of increases in the administrative line.
- We have very limited flexibility with this program due to its highly prescriptive rules, for example staff-to-supervisor ratios. While the rules don't specify the exact number of cases per staff member, our caseloads are increasing significantly. Additionally, the Elder Justice COVID funding, which was used to help offset overspending in the administrative

line, has ended with the close of the last state fiscal year. Moving forward, we won't have that funding source available.

- The state reallocates funds from the client services line to cover any overspending in administration if the client services line is underspent. However, even with this reallocation, there is still insufficient funding to fully cover the administrative overspending.
- This situation requires advocacy at the state level because we lack the flexibility to reduce expenditures locally. It's crucial to ensure that our local delegates are aware of the budgetary constraints and potential legislative impacts on this program area as they review and discuss the budgets.
- Commissioner John Kefalas asked how we cover the additional deficit and where the extra funding will come from to address it.
- Division Manager Lori Metz explained that the additional funding to cover the deficit must come from county funding. She also noted that as we review more of the department's activities, you'll see that the increase in the number of APS cases and referrals is a continued trend, not just a temporary spike. The work in this area is ongoing.
- Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally asked for clarification on whether the federal funding received for the Office on Aging fully covers the costs of running the office, including staff expenses. She noted that despite receiving federal funding, the county still incurs costs to operate the office and manage its staff.
- Human Services Director Heather O’Hayre explained that Adult Protective Services (APS) operates differently from the Office on Aging in terms of funding. For APS, the county is required to contribute 20% of the total funding. However, due to overspending, the county actually ends up covering not just the 20% contribution but also an additional 46% to cover the overspent amount. This results in a more substantial county contribution for APS compared to the Office on Aging.
- In contrast, the Office on Aging’s funding model does not require the same level of county contribution. Overall, due to significant overspending across all program areas, the county is experiencing reduced coverage for these expenses through the state’s closeout process. This means that the strategy of covering overspending by drawing on under-spent funds from other counties is no longer viable, forcing the county to make significant reductions in expenditures.

- **The Child Welfare Budget** includes multiple line items that aggregate various expenses. These expenses cover services provided to families, including those through vendor contracts and community partnerships, as well as staffing and administrative costs.
- For the first time in seven or eight years, the state as a whole was overspent in child welfare. This issue is widespread across multiple counties, particularly affecting the larger 10-11 counties. The overspending is attributed to several factors: increased rates for foster parents, rising staffing costs, and the expenses associated with administering services. Overall, the state was 9% overspent by the end of the fiscal year 2023-2024.
- While there is a slight increase in the child welfare block funding, this increase is insufficient for two main reasons. First, it does not cover the overspending from the last state fiscal year. Second, the increase is primarily allocated to implementing changes from Senate Bill 24-008, which involves raising financial assistance rates for non-certified kinship caregivers. Although this support is necessary and desired, the funding provided through the legislative process is neither adequate nor sustainable. Discussions are ongoing as these changes, effective September 1, are implemented.
- **Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP):** Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre discussed the Child Care Assistance Program, which has been under a funding freeze since February 1, 2024. This program is grappling with the loss of significant COVID-19 ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds. Last year, $1.7 million in COVID funding was used, but this money is no longer available.

  The state has provided a slight increase in funding—rising from just over $8.2 million last year to just over $8.3 million this year. However, this increase is insufficient to cover the anticipated spending of up to $9.7 million this year. This shortfall is due to federal regulations that prevent the removal of children from the program, even in the face of budget constraints. Further discussions will be needed to address this funding gap and find a solution.

- Commissioner John Kefalas inquired about what is needed to lift the freeze on the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), noting that there is a waiting list. He asked what actions or resources would be required to begin serving more children.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre stated that, at a minimum, an additional $1.6 million would be needed to transition from a freeze on the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to a wait list. This amount would not be sufficient to serve everyone in need but would allow the program to operate within the current budget constraints.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre added that there are significant changes occurring at the federal level, which will impact the state's programmatic operations. The state anticipates that coming into full compliance with these federal changes by 2026 will

cost $52 million. Some of these changes will start to be implemented on October 1 of this year. The state is seeking waivers to delay full implementation until 2026 due to budget constraints. Reconciling the $52 million in required changes with a budget-neutral stance presents a challenge.

- **Colorado Works (TANF):** also known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), is the program that offers case management services to individuals receiving Colorado Works benefits. The goal is to help these individuals increase or secure employment to move out of poverty. The allocation for this program covers a mix of services and resources used to support these efforts.
- The largest portion of the Colorado Works allocation goes towards providing cash assistance to households. Additionally, it funds the staffing for case managers. There is also some flexible funding available within the budget, which can be used for various supportive needs such as transportation, training programs (like obtaining a CDL), and other resources to help individuals upskill and increase their income. Last year, the program was slightly over budget.
- The challenge with the Colorado Works program is that we are facing a 5% reduction in our budget while simultaneously needing to increase the cash payments provided to households significantly. This means we have to absorb the increased cost of these payments within our reduced allocation.
- The reason we have to absorb the increased cost into our allocation is due to a three-year funding plan previously established by the state (due to HB22-1259). This plan was designed to cover the costs with one-third of the funding from ARPA, one-third from state reserves, and one-third from county contributions. With the loss of ARPA funds, the responsibility has shifted, requiring us to cover more of the costs. This situation results in us dealing with both a 5% reduction in our allocation and the need to absorb the increased basic cash assistance payments.
- Due to the loss of allocation and the need to absorb increased cash assistance payments, it's very likely we won't have any flexible funding available to address additional needs of our clients. This means we will need to look for other partners and resources from different programs to help meet these needs. The reduction in funding for this program is significant, impacting our ability to offer additional support.
- Commissioner Kristen Stephens asked if this is an entitlement program.
- Human Services Director Heather O’Hayre confirmed that the basic cash assistance is an entitlement program, meaning we are required to cover that cost. The remaining allocation is used to cover administrative expenses for the case managers who assist those individuals.

- T**<u>he Community Services Block Grant</u>** operates on a calendar year, so by the end of June, we are on track with our expected spending, which is why the report shows we're only 40% spent so far. This program, unique to Larimer County and not commonly found in other county Human Services Departments, is dedicated to helping individuals escape poverty. It is highly flexible and specifically focused on poverty alleviation. We frequently use this program to support Colorado Works households, especially as other budget constraints arise. Despite an annual budget of $512,000, we typically exhaust these funds before the end of the year.
- Commissioner John Kefalas asked if there is a formula that determines the amount of Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding received by different jurisdictions.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre explained that Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding is determined by a formula based on total population, demographics, and poverty levels.

  The allocation considers both the population size and the distribution between municipalities and unincorporated areas.

- **<u>County Admin:</u>** Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre provided an update on county administration funding, which supports the cost of the administering public benefits programs; the teams that are using the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS). There has been a significant increase in this allocation from $6 million to $10.7 million over the past years, reflecting the growing needs. This increase includes some COVID-related public health emergency funding, which will expire soon.

  Despite this increase, the county has had to manage overspending from its own funds because there are no other sources to cover these costs. Efforts are underway to advocate for additional state funding. A recent workload study revealed a $30 million shortfall in funding needed to manage current workloads, and ongoing advocacy is aimed at addressing this gap.

  Additionally, the CBMS system has experienced significant issues. The Governor's office is planning a meeting to discuss the long-term vision for the CBMS system, including why starting anew is not feasible due to estimated costs exceeding $100 million. This meeting will focus on finding ways to enhance the current system and address its challenges.

- Commissioner John Kefalas expressed interest in knowing the date of the upcoming meeting on the Colorado Benefit Management System (CBMS). He asked to be informed if his participation would be beneficial. Additionally, he inquired about the status of presenting the county perspective on CBMS to the State Board of Human Services, noting that he had not received any updates on this matter and wondering if it was still planned.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre will first check with Katie First from Colorado Counties Inc. (CCI), who was working on convening the presentation to the State Board of Human Services. Heather will look into the current status this week, as progress may have slowed with the involvement of the Governor's office. She will provide an update once she has more information.
- **Employment First** operates on a federal fiscal year, making its funding model quite complex. This program involves nine different sub-items, each with its own county match requirements. It provides case management for food assistance recipients, functioning as the counterpart to Colorado Works.
- Vanessa Fewell, who manages our Benefits and Community Support Division, is currently presenting at a national conference on this work. She has been instrumental in expanding our funding through third-party partnerships, where community partners have contracts with the State Department for Employment First. These partnerships help secure additional funding for the community.
- In terms of funding, the **Office on Aging** is facing significant reductions. The state fiscal year 2023-24 allocation is $3.2 million, down from just over $4.3 million last year—a 26% reduction. This cut comes on top of a loss of ARPA (COVID-related) funding. As a result, we have had to modify and reduce contracts with community partners, impacting services provided to older adults and their caregivers.
- Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally noted that the Farm Bill, which has been a topic of discussion with federal partners, is not expected to pass until next year. The bill is currently stalled, and there are no anticipated changes or progress on this front at the moment.
- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre explained that, based on current information from the federal level, there is unlikely to be much progress on the Farm Bill, the Older Americans Act, or other congressional items until after the election and into the new year.
- Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally remarked that, despite ongoing discussions, the situation remains challenging. She highlighted that organizations like Meals on Wheels provide much more than just meals and questioned whether these partners have been informed about the limitations we're facing. She wanted to publicly confirm if these partners are aware of the difficulties and if they understand the constraints we're operating under.

- Division Manager Lori Metz explained that community partners are informed as our funding changes.
- The **Aid to the Needy and Disabled (AND)** Navigator program, which we've previously highlighted for its success, has unfortunately ended. This program was phased out due to legislation passed in the spring. The legislation established the Colorado Disability Opportunity Office, funded by unexpectedly high revenue from new colored license plates. As a result, this new office will absorb and oversee programs from other state departments that previously served individuals with disabilities and their families.
- We are currently awaiting the opening of grant opportunities to apply for funding that may help sustain this program in the future.
- We have managed to sustain one senior case manager whose work with this population has been highly impactful. Her efforts are so effective that she is nearly covering the cost of the program through the recoupment of state funds as she helps individuals transition from state-funded to federal Social Security benefits. She has significantly accelerated this process, getting individuals into federal benefits six to nine months sooner than before, which provides them with more stable and sustainable support.
- Recently, we integrated her into the Office on Aging team to enhance collaboration, as she often works with individuals who are also served by that office across various programs.
- In closing, Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre explained that the department is managing budget uncertainties through a multi-faceted approach. She noted that some challenges anticipated by the county are already impacting their program areas, necessitating reductions in expenditures to align with available allocations.

  With less state-level funding to cover overspending, the department is making budget reductions for the current calendar year while also preparing for potential changes in the next year.

  To navigate these challenges, the department conducts a budget retreat and monthly meetings to review each budget, track spending, project year-end balances, and adjust as needed. They focus on finding efficiencies across programs and engage in tough conversations to distinguish between mandated services and additional, beneficial services that may no longer be sustainable. The goal is to transition smoothly without negatively impacting the community or partners, and to remain adaptable, similar to other departments facing similar financial constraints.

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Department Activity Report - Jill Maasch, Lori Metz, Thad Paul, Heather O'Hayre
Link to Presentation: Quarterly Activity Report

- **Changes to report format and process:** In previous years, we have submitted PowerPoint presentations that required many hours of manual preparation. However, for our most recent meeting with the Board of Social Services, we transitioned to a more efficient approach by developing a Tableau dashboard. Our data team has worked hard to automate this process, resulting in a report with about 22 pages or dashboards, of which 20 are fully automated. This means that data is now pulled and updated automatically, eliminating the need for manual data retrieval.

  We collaborated with the county IT department to publish this dashboard on our Human Services page. While no individual data points are publicly accessible (e.g., specific details about individuals), the dashboard can be accessed via the link on our main Human Services page under "Quick Links." It will be updated at least quarterly, but we could potentially update it monthly if needed.

  We want to acknowledge the significant effort put in by our team to create this dashboard. Going forward, we plan to refine how we present and overlay data to ensure clarity and usefulness in our reports.

- **Highlights to call out for Quarter 2 2024:**The SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) caseload is steadily increasing. This dashboard illustrates the amount of SNAP and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) benefits provided to clients on a quarterly basis. Both the benefits provided and the caseload are rising concurrently.
- On the next tab of the dashboard, labeled "BCS Caseload," you can see this trend in detail. For example, in the second quarter of 2023, the caseload was around 17,000, and in the second quarter of 2024, it has grown to approximately 18,300. This ongoing increase reflects a consistent upward trend in both the amount of benefits and the number of clients served.
- The SNAP caseload has been steadily increasing since 2019. Back then, the caseload was around 12,500, and it has now grown to over 18,000. This rise can be attributed to two main factors:
  1. Enhanced Training: Division Managers Jill Maasch and Vanessa Fewell have provided extensive training for community partners, helping them understand the complexities of the SNAP program. This has improved access to resources, allowing more people to get the assistance they need more quickly and easily.

2. Increased Need: There has been a significant rise in the level of need due to the increased cost of living over the same period. While part of the increase is driven by our efforts to educate community partners and streamline access, a substantial portion is due to the growing economic challenges faced by individuals and families.

- On the AAS Ombudsman tab, Division Manager Lori Metz highlighted a change in how we report data. Last fall, the ombudsman team transitioned to a new data system at the state level, which affected how cases and complaints are counted. For example, in the past, if a caller had three separate concerns about a facility, each concern was counted as a separate complaint. Now, these concerns are counted as a single complaint, regardless of the number of issues reported.
- Looking at the Child Protection placements data, specifically the CYF placements, Division Manager Thad Paul highlighted a few points. First, while it appears that our child welfare allocation is increasing each year, this new funding is not for new programs; it's essentially to continue existing programs. The key point is that the daily rates for foster care, including QRTP (Qualified Residential Treatment Programs) and other placements, have been rising. Therefore, the additional allocation mainly helps cover the increasing out-of-home costs rather than in-home services for families.

  We should highlight the impact of last year's kinship bill, SB 24-008. This bill provides funding to support kinship families who are not certified but are caring for children in a kinship setting, such as those in temporary custody or parent-approved placements with kin providers. Certification requirements for kinship families are stringent, so this bill helps provide some financial support to non-certified kinship caregivers, though it only covers a fraction of the daily rate.

  It's important to note that while our allocation may seem to increase, this funding can quickly be depleted by high costs, such as $2,200 per day for a child in high-acuity crisis situations. Our use of congregate care is minimal; for example, we currently have only one child in a QRTP, and we are actively managing cases with high needs, including children in subacute hospitals and those requiring out-of-state placements.

  Additionally, there are about 90 kinship children who are not included in this graph because they are not in our custody but are living with kinship providers. The federal government only counts out-of-home placements that are in custody of the department. Despite this, approximately 67% of our placements are in kinship settings, which is about 25% higher than other counties in the state.

- Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally asked if the 76% of children in kinship care leads to better outcomes and whether this percentage is higher than in other counties. She also inquired if these higher percentages are reflected in our outcome data.
    - Division Manager Thad Paul responded that our outcomes are indeed very strong. Research shows that kinship care has long-term positive effects. Children in kinship care tend to return home more quickly, achieve permanency faster, and are less likely to re-enter the system.
- Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally inquired about the issues related to subacute care and whether they are unique to Colorado or if they are a nationwide concern. She asked if this problem is being addressed at the federal level or if it is primarily a state issue. She also wondered if there are any states that have successfully managed these challenges and if there are any examples or roadmaps we could explore to improve the situation.
    - Division Manager Thad Paul suggested that New Jersey's system of care is a good model to follow. New Jersey has developed effective methods for managing complex behavioral health situations. However, he noted that many states, including Colorado, are facing challenges in finding suitable in-state placements and are often forced to send children out of state. This issue is widespread and not unique to Colorado.
- Commissioner John Kefalas asked about the high acuity bill that was recently passed. He inquired about the bill number and wanted to know how it will address the current situation. Specifically, he asked if the bill will help resolve the issues we are facing.
    - Division Manager Thad Paul mentioned that he does not recall the bill number off the top of his head, but explained that the purpose of the bill is to increase the availability of high-acuity placement beds in the state.
    - Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre explained that the bill will help address the immediate crisis by increasing the number of high-acuity placement beds and enhancing staff training for those managing these facilities. However, she noted that this solution is costly and only a short-term fix, with an investment of $25 million over the next three years. It does not address the broader issue of improving services upstream or the entire continuum of care that is needed.
    - Division Manager Thad Paul explained that one of the challenges is that even with more available beds, children may be discharged or removed from these placements because their behaviors are too escalated for the

facility to manage safely. If we don't address the safety and management of the facility environment, we could end up in the same cycle: having more beds but struggling to keep children in those placements. Each failed placement compounds a child's long-term trauma, making it increasingly difficult for future placements to accept the child into their programs.

- Human Services Director Heather O'Hayre highlighted some new data presented by Gordon Coombs, our Operations Division Manager. We have recently added two slides showing our lobby traffic and the reasons people visit. Over the past 18 months, especially since we opened the new lobby at 2555 Midpoint, we have been tracking this information for the first time.

  The increase in lobby traffic from July 2023 to January 2024 is largely attributed to the Medicaid re-enrollment process, which people had to go through after a four-year hiatus. After that period, we saw a gradual decline in traffic. For June 2024, we had 1,679 individuals visit our Blue Spruce lobby in just one month, indicating a continued high volume of visitors.

  Our Welcome Center team, which we've rebranded to better reflect our approach, has undergone extensive training in community resources and crisis response. This training helps them manage the diverse needs of visitors and connect them with additional community resources if necessary.

  We track both the volume of visitors and the reasons for their visits. Many people come with general questions, to drop off documentation, or to follow up on existing cases. Gordon and his team review this data to explore ways to improve service delivery, such as reducing the need for in-person visits by expanding access through other means. They also consider transportation challenges faced by individuals from outerlying communities. This ongoing analysis aims to enhance how we serve people and hopefully make their experience smoother.

Agenda items for November

- Division Managers Jill Maasch, Vanessa Fewell, and Gordon Coombes' teams have been working on a significant grant application for food assistance with federal partners. The goal is to create a mobile office—a van or similar vehicle—that can travel to outlying areas of the county to help people access our services without needing to visit one of our physical locations.

Last week, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) within the Department of Agriculture reached out to us with a positive update. They expressed interest in funding our project

but requested that we reduce the budget slightly and remove a specific component from our application. We revised the budget accordingly and resubmitted it.

We are optimistic that, by November, we will be able to report that we have secured the grant. If successful, we plan to fully implement the mobile office approach we've been discussing for four or five years. We're making progress and will provide more updates as we move forward.

- We are planning to present our work with CSU on assessing the needs of older adults and evaluating our older adult programming in November. We will also include the department activity report. If there's anything else you would like us to cover or add to the agenda, please let us know, and we'll be happy to include it.

The commissioners ended the meeting by thanking the Human Services team and staff for all of their work and service to the community. The meeting was adjourned.