

Child & Youth Services Committee Meeting Douglas County, Nebraska

Thursday, July 16, 2015

The meeting convened at 2:01 p.m. in Room 903 of the Omaha-Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE 68183. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is located on the wall near the entrance of the room. A notice of the meeting was published in the July 10, 2015 issue of The Daily Record. County Commissioners present at the meeting were Chris Rodgers, Mary Ann Borgeson, Clare Duda, and Marc Kraft. Others present at the beginning of the meeting were Patrick Bloomingdale, Diane Carlson, Joe Lorenz, Catherine Hall, Marcos San Martin, Pam Murphy, and Kaieva Williams of Administration; Theresia Urich and Shakil Malik of the County Attorney's office; Tim McNally of the Civil Service Commission/Human Resources (HR); Jerry Leahy of Public Property; Dan Esch of the Clerk/Comptroller's office; and Cody Winchester of the Omaha World-Herald. Commissioner Rodgers conducted the meeting.

1. Consideration of creating in-house Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) department.

Shawne Coonfare Johnson of the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) entered the meeting during this item, as well as Karen Buche of HR, Melanie Williams-Smotherman of Family Advocacy Movement, and Laura McCormack, citizen. Speaking during this item were Commissioner Rodgers, Ms. Coonfare Johnson, Mr. Bloomingdale, Commissioner Kraft, Ms. Urich, Commissioner Duda, Commissioner Borgeson, Mr. Lorenz, and Ms. Carlson. Highlights from the discussion included the following:

- Commissioner Rodgers said the County Board has been discussing whether or not it should contract for GAL services or create a GAL department.
- Commissioner Rodgers said the 2015/16 budget was put together with the assumption that something was going to be done in regards to addressing GAL costs.
- Mr. Bloomingdale provided and reviewed a draft budget for a Douglas County GAL department (see Attachment #1).
- Mr. Bloomingdale said he thinks the Juvenile Court is reluctant to state a formal position on what the County Board does with GAL services going forward, but that doesn't necessarily mean the Juvenile Court wouldn't assign cases to staff in an in-house GAL department.
 - Mr. Bloomingdale said if the in-house department had good GALs who had the respect of the Juvenile Court and of the community, there would be no reason for the Juvenile Court not to use them.
- Commissioner Duda said autonomy is an important part of this.
 - Commissioner Duda said if GAL is done in-house, he doesn't want the staff to answer to the County Board.
 - Commissioner Duda said he's not sure how to go about doing that, but he doesn't want the County Board to be in the loop of the judicial system.
 - Commissioner Duda said he would like to look into how the Commission on Public Advocacy is governed.
 - Commissioner Duda talked about the County Board and Juvenile Court being distinct separate entities, and not wanting to cloud that by the County Board getting overly involved.

- Commissioner Duda said the County Board should not be in a position where it can impact anything going on in the courts, beyond making budgetary decisions.
 - Mr. Bloomingdale said although it's not an "apples to apples" comparison, he does think there is a way for the in-house department to maintain the necessary level of autonomy and still answer to the County Board because that's able to be done in the elected offices of the Public Defender and the County Attorney.
- Mr. Bloomingdale said he has begun to work on a draft RFP in case the County Board wants to do a contract.
 - Commissioner Duda said he thinks it is possible to structure contracts in a way that would get the kind of accountability and transparency that was missing before.
 - If this could be accomplished, Commissioner Duda said he thinks his first choice would be to go back to contracting out again.
- Commissioner Borgeson said not only does the County Board have to think in terms of the money, but also what is the best for the children and the families.
- Commissioner Rodgers said there has to be a way to work in a CASA/social worker piece for the out-of-court aspect of GAL.
- Commissioner Borgeson said maybe every child or family doesn't need to have a GAL appointed to them, and talked about finding out why that seems to be an automatic thing.
- Commissioner Rodgers talked about keeping the Juvenile Court informed on what the County Board is thinking about doing for GAL.
- Commissioner Borgeson said on July 21st, Kendall Marlowe, an expert in the field of GAL, will give a presentation to the County Board on creating a model GAL system.
- Commissioner Rodgers talked about both options of contracting and an in-house GAL department being on the County Board agenda in late August and early September.
 - Commissioner Rodgers talked about the items being up for discussion for three weeks before being up for a vote.

2. Other business

There was no other business.

The meeting adjourned at 2:24 p.m.