



**BOARD MEETING**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2021  
 9:00 AM**

**JUVENILE WELFARE BOARD  
 14155 58<sup>TH</sup> STREET NORTH  
 EDMONDS NERI CONFERENCE ROOM  
 CLEARWATER, FL 33760  
 MINUTES**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Michael Mikurak, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM

JWB Staff Present: Beth Houghton, Laura Krueger Brock, Lynda Leedy, Laura Peele, Shannon Phillips, Karen Boggess, Debra Prewitt, April Putzulu, Dr. Barbara Morrison-Rodriguez, Zebrina Edgerton-Maloy, Sara Winter

Attorney: Colleen Flynn, Esq.

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Michael Mikurak	Board Chair	Present
Patrice Moore	Board Vice Chair, 6 <sup>th</sup> Judicial Court Judge	Present
Rick Butler	Board Secretary	Present
Brian Aungst, Jr.	Board Member	Present
Sara Mollo	Public Defender	Present
Michael Grego	Superintendent	Absent
Bruce Bartlett	State Attorney	Present
James Millican	Board Member	Absent
Susan Rolston	Board Member	Absent
Karen Seel	Pinellas County Commissioner	Present

**II. CONSENT ITEM**

**Approve Board Minutes from October 14, 2021**

Mr. Mikurak called for approval of the Consent Item.

**ACTION: Ms. Sara Mollo, Public Defender, made a motion to approve the Consent Item; Mr. Bruce Bartlett, State Attorney, seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

**III. ACTION ITEM****A. Approve Executive Committee Recommendations on Chief Executive Officer's Annual Evaluation and Amendment to the Employment Agreement – *Michael Mikurak, Board Chair***

Mr. Mikurak presented the recommendations of the Executive Committee. He affirmed that Ms. Beth Houghton, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) did an amazing job in FY21 and received positive reviews from the Executive Committee and other board members.

The Executive Committee also reviewed information related to Ms. Houghton's salary that was provided by an outside consulting firm, Evergreen Solutions. The consultants reviewed salaries for CEOs of children's services councils in Broward, Palm Beach, Miami-Dade, and Hillsborough County.

Mr. Mikurak explained that after reviewing the salaries of CEOs in children's services councils in other counties, the Executive Committee proposed a base salary adjustment to \$200,000 in FY22 for Ms. Houghton. Mr. Mikurak further explained this recommendation for a salary adjustment was based on performance and would also bring JWB to the correct market range in the event that a new CEO would need to be hired.

Mr. Mikurak also requested to add a change in the wording of Ms. Houghton's contract that states the Board will approve the performance metrics by which they will be reviewing the CEO. He also would like to see stretch goals added to the CEO's contract to create an environment where JWB can strive to go slightly beyond the standard goals.

Commissioner Karen Seel asked if Ms. Houghton receives any additional compensation, including deferred compensation or a car allowance. Mr. Mikurak answered Ms. Houghton receives additional retirement compensation that is standard to what the State of Florida provides to other organizations. Ms. Colleen Flynn, Board Attorney answered Ms. Houghton receives a flat \$700 per month car allowance with no reimbursement for mileage. Mr. Mikurak added this amount for a car allowance is in line with other counties in Florida. Ms. Houghton added for transparency that she does receive the same cell phone stipend that all JWB employees are eligible to receive.

Commissioner Seel inquired about the salary study findings for the rest of JWB staff. Mr. Mikurak answered the consultant group will present their findings and recommendations at the December Board meeting.

Mr. Mikurak stated the Executive Committee requested Ms. Houghton to extend her contract by another three years, instead of two years. This three-year extension was added into the CEO contract.

Mrs. Rolston asserted her belief that it is critical for JWB to be comparable in salaries to other children's services boards in counties across the state with similar budgets. This is especially important for the event the CEO leaves the organization.

Ms. Houghton explained that the annual leave included in her package comes into effect every October, at the beginning of the fiscal year, but cannot be carried over year after year.

Ms. Houghton and Mr. Mikurak will work on goals and stretch goals to present to the Board at the December meeting. Board members are encouraged to ask questions and make any suggestions regarding the FY22 CEO Goals.

**ACTION: Mr. Brian Aungst, Jr. made a motion to approve Executive Committee Recommendations on Chief Executive Officer's Annual Evaluation and Amendment to the Employment Agreement; Councilman Rick Butler seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### IV. PRESENTATIONS

##### A. Comments from Mr. Dennis Miles, Regional Managing Director, Florida Department of Children and Families

Mr. Dennis Miles, Regional Managing Director for the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), was in attendance for the Board meeting. Mr. Mikurak requested that Mr. Miles present on behalf of DCF before the other scheduled Board presentations.

Mr. Miles introduced himself to the JWB Board and summarized his tenure at DCF. He explained that Broward County went through a similar situation in their child welfare system to Pinellas County, but they were able to put together a road map to recovery and are still successful today. After spending four months in the Florida Northeast region, Mr. Miles was requested to transfer to the Suncoast region to fix the issues in the child welfare system.

Mr. Miles assured the Board he is willing to serve the Suncoast region as Regional Director for as long as he is needed. He also assured the Board that DCF is thoroughly investigating Eckerd Connects (Eckerd). There will be a clear plan in place to make the transition from Eckerd as easy as possible. The contract with Eckerd for Circuit Six ends on December 30, 2021. Mr. Miles explained an emergency procurement will be released in order to find another agency to provide child welfare services.

Mr. Bartlett asked if there are any potential providers interested in replacing Eckerd as the child welfare provider for Circuit Six. Mr. Miles answered that initially, there was no interest other than Eckerd, but he has received a few inquiries from other agencies over the last few days.

Mr. Bartlett expressed his concern with maintaining the efficiency ratios in the child welfare system during transition. He stated that the system is currently experiencing significant delays due to not being able to receive needed paperwork from Eckerd. Mr. Bartlett asked how quickly someone will be able to step in and fill in gaps with documentation so judges can make decisions in dependency cases. Mr. Miles responded there will not be overnight improvement, but there will be effort to meet with judges and case managers to strategize how to increase exits of children from the dependency system.

Mr. Miles explained that he had a meeting with Judge Patrice Moore to discuss her frustration with the lack of movement in cases. Judge Moore expressed her frustration that case managers were showing up for hearings after receiving the case that same morning and often they were the third or fourth case manager on that same case. She expressed this makes it impossible for her to make rulings in child dependency cases. Mr. Miles further acknowledged the move to terminate the contract with Eckerd is the correct move, but he is disappointed in the delay it will cause in cases.

Commissioner Seel asked what will happen to children in the dependency system during the transition period. Mr. Miles answered Eckerd will be in service for the next 30-60 days. The Sheriff's office was requested to do welfare checks to make sure every child in the foster care system is accounted for. Mr. Miles assured the Board that every effort will be made to assure every child in the foster system will have a sense of permanency and that all children will be accounted for.

Mr. Mikurak thanked Mr. Miles for updating the Board on the ongoing efforts to transition the child welfare system to a different service provider and encouraged Mr. Miles to continue to work with JWB to make sure they can do everything possible to support a smooth transition. Mr. Miles provided his contact information to members of the Board and said they can contact him at any time.

Mrs. Rolston stated she hopes that lessons will be learned from what happened in the child welfare systems in Broward and Pinellas County and that a future situation similar to what the two counties experienced can be prevented from happening again. Mr. Miles assured Mrs. Rolston he will be an advocate on behalf of the Suncoast region to make a positive change.

## **B. Legislative Report Presentation**

Ms. Debra Prewitt, Senior Public Policy Officer, presented the JWB 2021 Legislative and Public Policy Consensus Platform. The Consensus Platform is a pre-approved slate of public policy issues that provides real time advocacy opportunities on behalf of Pinellas County children and families.

The JWB 2021 Session Advocacy included support of Florida's extension of Medicaid Postpartum coverage from 60 days to 12 months. JWB also encouraged Florida to accept \$35 million from the Pandemic Emergency Assistance Funds included in the American Rescue Plan.

For post-session advocacy, JWB supported house resolutions for the Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021 (H.R. 3115) and H.R. 4217, Taskforce Recommending Improvements for Unaddressed Mental Perinatal & Postpartum Health (TRIUMPH).

Ms. Prewitt summarized the Federal and State Public Policy analysis related to child nutrition. The algorithm formula used to allocate Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to families will be updated for the first time in 45 years. The State of Florida requested a \$1 billion allocation for Pandemic-EBT to begin issuing on November 15, 2021 over a 30-day period.

Ms. Prewitt provided an update on the child tax credit status. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 gives \$300 per month per child to families with children under six years old. Families with children ages six to seventeen receive \$250 per month. Research indicates six million children were kept out of poverty in July 2021 after the monthly payments began. Ms. Prewitt showed a chart of how child tax credit funds were spent. The most utilized areas were food, utilities, paying down debt, and putting money into savings.

High Quality Child Care and Universal Pre-K for 3 and 4-year-olds are components of proposed H.R. 5376 Build Back Better Act. The resolution proposes enacting Universal Pre-Kindergarten with State opt-in. Federal funds will be provided for the Pre-K program for the first three years, with the State share increasing to 40 percent by the fifth year and federal funding phasing out entirely by the seventh year. The Build Back Better Act also proposes \$200 billion in funding for

high quality child care, with the goal of expanding access to 20 million children and decreasing childcare costs to no more than seven percent of family household income.

Ms. Houghton asked Ms. Prewitt what she anticipates Florida will do in response to Universal Pre-K if passed at the federal level. Ms. Prewitt answered there are a variety of options for what Florida can do. She summarized the formation of the Office of Early Learning and new push for kindergarten readiness, potentially indicating acceptance of a Universal Pre-K program, but there is no guarantee.

Ms. Prewitt summarized potential issues to include in future JWB consensus platforms including Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization, Child Care Industry Supports, and Affordable Housing.

Mr. Mikurak announced the November meeting will be Ms. Prewitt's last JWB Board Meeting. Ms. Prewitt has served as Senior Public Policy Officer with JWB for 20 years and her public service to Florida spans over 30 years. Ms. Prewitt built strong relationships with elected officials and community leaders at local, state, and national levels. Ms. Prewitt developed legislative priorities, consensus platforms, and letters of support advocating for the children and families of Pinellas County. Mr. Mikurak expressed gratitude to Ms. Prewitt for her dedication in service to Pinellas County children.

### **C. JWB Early Child Care Provider Scholarships**

Dr. Barbara Morrison-Rodriguez, Chief Evaluation and Innovation Officer, presented on the JWB Early Childhood Education Degree Program Scholarship. JWB has collaborated with St. Petersburg College since 2018 to provide scholarships specified for an Associate or Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education. Scholarship recipients must be currently employed in a licensed early childhood setting in Pinellas County, intend to remain employed in early childhood for a minimum of one year after completing a degree, and must maintain at least a C grade in all coursework.

The allocation from JWB is currently \$54,000 per calendar year, paid at the beginning of the year in one sum. Scholarships may be applied toward all coursework for the degree. Since the start of the program in 2018, 258 scholarships were awarded to 81 students. Out of the 81 students who received a scholarship, 90 percent remained in employment in private early learning centers and two percent changed from private to public school setting. Dr. Morrison-Rodriguez played a video showing the positive impact the scholarship program has had on the recipients.

Mrs. Rolston expressed her strong support for the Early Child Care Provider Scholarship program. She asked to clarify why there is a gap in graduations versus scholarships awarded. Dr. Morrison-Rodriguez answered there are scholarship recipients who are still in the process of completing the degree program.

Mr. Bartlett asked for the cost per credit hour for classes at St. Petersburg College. Ms. Flynn looked up the information on the St. Petersburg College tuition and fees website and provided the tuition costs to Mr. Bartlett.

Mr. Mikurak requested data collection of average grades for students in the degree programs. Dr. Morrison-Rodriguez answered she can get this data from Anne Ryan, Chair of the St. Petersburg College of Education.

**V. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT**

Ms. Houghton introduced new Public Policy Director, Rebecca Gross Tieder. Ms. Tieder is a fourth generation Floridian who has spent her career in a variety of settings, mostly focused on public policy. Her first day at JWB was on October 25<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Tieder thanked members of the JWB Board for their leadership and service. She also thanked Ms. Prewitt for her assistance in her transition to her new role.

Dr. Gayle Ingraham will join JWB as the new Early Learning Strategic Initiatives Manager on December 6th. Dr. Ingraham has a doctorate in Education and extensive experience in kinship care, social services management, parent and community engagement, and quality assurance.

Ms. Houghton announced the promotions of Karen Boggess to Chief Program Officer, Megan Seales to Performance and Evaluation Manager, and JoAnn DiLernia to Senior Technical Program Evaluator.

Ms. Houghton and Mr. Mikurak drafted a response letter to a request made by the US Senate Committee on Finance for public comments on children and youth behavioral health. Mr. Mikurak commended the efforts of the non-partisan community group that was formed to find a solution on mental health issues.

Ms. Houghton announced the status of the agreement with Central Square Solutions to replace the current JWB Accounting Software, Great Plains. Staff worked diligently with Central Square to implement the new software program. Unfortunately, the implementation process has not gone well. The go live date was supposed to be October 1, 2020. During the implementation process, staff experienced significant defects in software, including the inability to generate accurate financial statements. The defects, plus significant turnover, caused significant delay in the implementation process. The new go live date was moved to October 1, 2021. On August 30, 2021 JWB consulted with Zachary Messa, attorney with Johnson Pope, to send a notice of breach giving Central Square the opportunity to fix defects. After failure to fix defects, the contract with Central Square was terminated. JWB is requiring all money to be refunded, plus compensation for damage caused. The contract requires JWB and Central Square to attempt dispute resolutions before starting mediation or litigation. JWB is in the process of scheduling good faith negotiations in the dispute resolution process and staff are hopeful it will not have to escalate beyond that point. Ms. Houghton will continue to update the Board on the status of this process.

**VI. OPEN AGENDA**

There were no comments from the public.

Mr. Mikurak pulled Information Item VI.C., Program and Financial Monitoring, which includes a status of the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) for 211 Tampa Bay Cares. Mr. Mikurak would like to receive more information about what Pinellas County government plans to do in response to the ongoing performance issues with 211.

Ms. Houghton stated Pinellas County and JWB provide the majority of the funding for 211 and 211 has also been the front door provider for the JWB Family Services Initiative (FSI). If JWB chose to defund 211, an alternative provider would have to be immediately put into place to serve as the front door service provider.

Mrs. Rolston stated that performance issues with 211 have been an issue for many years. She thanked Mr. Mikurak for bringing this matter to the attention of the Board and also cautioned to make sure that 211 Board Chair is hearing this feedback from JWB. Ms. Houghton confirmed that she called the Board Chair of 211 when they were placed on a CAP.

Mr. Mikurak requested a presentation on the status of 211 at an upcoming Board meeting. Mrs. Rolston asked for members of the 211 Board and a representative from Pinellas County attend this meeting. The current CAP for 211 Tampa Bay Cares expires in February 2022.

**VII. ANNIVERSARIES**

Councilman Butler announced the October anniversaries.

**VIII. ADJOURN**

Mr. Mikurak moved for adjournment at 10:59 AM. No further discussion.

Minutes Submitted by:

Rick Butler  
Board Secretary  
12/9/2021