

KENTUCKY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DELIVERY SYSTEM TASK FORCE

Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2023 Interim

September 26, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 4th meeting of the Kentucky Health & Human Services Delivery System Task Force was held on September 26, 2023, at 3:00 PM in Room 171 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Stephen Meredith, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative David Meade Co-Chair; Senator Stephen Meredith Co-Chair; Senators Julie Raque Adams, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Denise Harper Angel, and Amanda Mays Bledsoe; Representatives Samara Heavrin, Kimberly Poore Moser, Amy Neighbors, and Sarah Stalker.

Guests: Dr. Steven Stack, Commissioner, Department for Public Health, Cabinet for Health & Family Services; Jan Chamness, Policy and Research Consultant, Department for Public Health, Cabinet for Health & Family Services; Sara Jo Best, Public Health Director, Lincoln Trail District Health Department; Marie Fraley, Field Services Supervisor, Northeastern Service Region, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services; John Krakowsky, Family Support Specialist, Northern Bluegrass Service Region, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services.

LRC Staff: Samir Nasir, Logan Bush, Becky Lancaster, and DJ Burns.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the August 22, 2023, minutes was made by Representative Heavrin, seconded by Senator Funke Frommeyer, and approved by a voice vote.

Discussion of Health Department Programs & Services

Jan Chamness, Policy and Research Consultant, Department for Public Health, Cabinet for Health & Family Services, discussed 20 RS HB 129 and its subsequent effect on funding services and programs for local public health departments including Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Health Access Nurturing Development Services (HANDS), and harm reduction programs. She discussed public health transformation including, programmatic review, classification system for local personnel, and local health department needs.

Sara Jo Best, Public Health Director, Lincoln Trail District Health Department, discussed services local health departments provide and how local health departments and the state department for public health collaborate to provide those services.

Dr. Steven Stack, Commissioner, Department for Public Health, Cabinet for Health & Family Services, discussed the three circles of public health, the inner circle being foundational services, the middle circle is core services, and the outermost circle is local health priorities. He reiterated that 20 RS HB 129 helped fully fund these circles and with community health assessments help, tailor which services each local health department needs.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Meredith, Dr. Stack stated that the Department for Public Health just hosted 10 of the 13 states in regions 4 & 6 and all the states are facing the same challenges. He stated that the Department for Public Health has invested in its workforce and in training employees to be able to discuss how health departments can help improve the overall health of the Commonwealth. He stated he is open to further discussions with the members of the task force.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Funke Frommeyer, Ms. Best stated that the department focuses on nutritional habits at conception through its WIC program and each school can request to partner with local health departments for health education programs for students. She stated that qualifying for WIC is based on nutritional risk or income need and anyone can qualify for the HANDS program. Dr. Stack stated that since the Covid pandemic, the Department for Public Health has increased the HANDS program by 7 percent and increased the rates for the first time in 20 years.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Moser, Dr. Stack stated that he is looking for areas to improve efficiencies. Ms. Chamness stated that focusing on transforming public health in the state as a whole and streamlining communication between local health departments and the state is the next steps to improving public health. Ms. Best stated that 20 RS HB 129 has provided a foundation for transformation of public health. She stated that comprehensive assessments and strategic planning on those assessments will help take this transformation to the next level.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Meredith, Dr. Stack stated that Secretary Friedlander along with himself and other leadership members of the Cabinet for Health & Family Services work as a team when it comes to the Department for Medicaid Services. He stated that the Department for Public Health has updated to eight federally registered Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) to assist each region with emergencies and five area health liaisons which helps with efficiency.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Stalker, Dr. Stack stated that he does not recall the statistic, but the Department for Public Health is working on integrating the WIC program with the KYNECT benefits system. He stated that the state must have a contract with a formula manufacturer which is federally mandated for the WIC program. He stated the federal government mandates the rules for the WIC program. Ms. Best stated that an app is available for WIC participants that shows what is allowed for purchase with WIC funds.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Harper Angel, Dr. Stack stated that the state is not required to follow the lowest bid. The state must follow a scoring paradigm.

Discussion of Public Assistance Benefits

Marie Fraley, Field Services Supervisor, Northeastern Service Region, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services, discussed available programs including Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (KTAP), and Medicaid.

John Krakowsky, Family Support Specialist, Northern Bluegrass Service Region, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health & Family Services, discussed the process for applying for public assistance benefits including in person and using the KYNECT system online.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Meredith, Mr. Krakowsky stated that once all verifications have been submitted, a decision will be made within 30 to 60 days. He stated due to the unwinding of the public health emergency, decisions are taking longer than 60 days but once a decision has been made, any benefits backdate to the date of the application being submitted. He stated to address backlog issues, the Cabinet for Health & Family Services has initiated a quick review to recertify SNAP through the optical character recognition (OCR). He stated an interview is used to verify household size, income level, resource level, and expenses allowed by federal government to determine benefit amounts. He stated that applications are processed at the state level. Ms. Fraley stated that the change was made to process applications on the state level to ensure fairness between smaller county offices and larger ones.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Meade, Ms. Fraley stated that she would have to follow up on the error rates after moving to the state level application processing.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Krakowsky stated that the SNAP employment and training program assists 16- to 52-year-old able bodied adults with no dependents who meet a minimum of 20 hours a week of volunteer or paid work.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Neighbors, Ms. Fraley stated that she does not believe the state wide application processing is not assisting in the backlog. She stated she would have to follow up on the number of applications backlogged before and after the switch to state wide processing. She stated CCAP processing times can affect if the participant loses their job or spot in daycare.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Meredith, Ms. Fraley stated that her opinion is that half of the regions are behind on processing applications and state wide processing is the long-term plan. Mr. Krakowsky stated that being able to pull employees from other counties assists in processing applications.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Heavrin, Ms. Fraley stated that in person traffic and phone calls have increased due to longer processing times. Mr. Krakowsky stated that prior to the OCR being instituted, an employee had to review all documents. Now the OCR verifies those documents which saves time. Ms. Fraley stated that when an elderly savings plan is closed, 2 months of the Medicaid premium is taken out of the participants check and once that plan is re-established it can take 3 to 6 months to be reimbursed.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Neighbors, Mr. Krakowsky stated that Medicaid recertifications are slightly behind by around 3 weeks. Those participants do not lose coverage, the timeline for recertifications is just moved.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Meredith, Mr. Krakowsky stated that in his tenor with the Cabinet for Health & Family Services, Jefferson County has always been behind in processing applications.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Harper Angel, Mr. Krakowsky stated that he isn't sure if each individual counties number of days behind in processing applications can be pulled from the system. Ms. Fraley stated that offices have 30 days to process an application and once that 30 days has passed then the case is behind.

Senator Raque Adams requested for a follow up with the data members had requested during the presentation.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:40 PM.