

HARFORD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Citizen Advisory Board
Minutes of October 23, 2025
In Person

Members Present: Andrée Mountain, Cynthia Phillips (“C”), Debbie Button (Aide to Nolanda Robert), Angela Mangione, Christine Gerhardt, Dan Rusin

Members Absent: Jim Kuterbach, Kourtney Cluster

Staff Present: Cora Grishkot, Sandi Johnson, Kristy Louvado

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes

- The minutes from September 25th, 2025, meeting were reviewed.
- September 25th, 2025, minutes were unanimously approved as presented upon the motion of Christine Gerhardt with a second from Angela Mangione.
- One change to this evenings’ agenda was unanimously approved upon the motion of Christine Gerhardt with a second from Angela Mangione. Staff Picnic baskets will be removed from General Discussion topics.

2. Board Chair Report (Andrée Mountain)

- The MASSB conference was a success with a range of informative presentations including some that highlighted Harford County.
- They presented valuable tools and resources that will benefit our boards ongoing work and initiatives.
- Andrée noted the trying times that we are facing and commended DSS on the work that is done.
- Andrée suggested that members check the MASSB website for legislative updates and important dates.
- Andrée shared an insightful discussion from the conference regarding the characteristics of an effective board. The key takeaways included the importance of strong communication, transparency, active engagement, successful fundraising, and a robust strategic plan.
- Given these points it is suggested that our board conduct self-evaluations to assess how we align with these characteristics.
- The 2026 conference will be held in Washington County.
- It is recommended Harford County apply for the Lifting Lives Award. Many of the programs awarded or discussed, Harford County has already initiated/implemented or completed.

3. Director's Report (Cora Grishkot)

- **Audit**
 - The Harford County audit is from 2022.
 - There will be another county audit within the next two years.
 - The state audit was recently released.
 - Directors will attend a hearing regarding the state audit next week.
 - A new policy is taking effect that will no longer allow foster youth to be placed in hotels or unlicensed centers.
 - There will be a need for emergency placements and respite for older foster youth, that may be for a short term.
 - More information is expected regarding this new policy.
- **Federal Shutdown**
 - A meeting with the DHS Secretary took place yesterday.
 - At this time, we do not know if there will be funds for November SNAP recipients.
 - It is possible the free and reduced lunches could be affected by this as well.
 - The agency will restock our food pantry with the remaining funds the board released to us.
 - We are requesting the board to release additional funds should the need arise.
 - The request to release \$1000.00 in funds to keep the food pantry stocked was unanimously approved upon the motion of Dan Rusin with a second from Christine Gerhardt.
 - The department will notify Dr. Mountain and Jim (finance chair) as funds are needed so they can notify MASSB.
 - We are working to have bus vouchers available for clients as well.
 - There will be a meeting next week with the Director of Community Services and the Harford Community Action Agency to begin collaborating.
 - Members discuss. Dan emphasized the importance of ensuring that community churches and food banks are aware of potential emergency needs, particularly if benefits are unavailable in November.
- **HR1**
 - This is a multi-tier bill that will go into effect over the next two years.
 - There will be several changes to the SNAP program that will impact program requirements and will also involve an increase in the state's financial contribution to program costs.
 - There will be changes to the automatic utility allowance and will now require verifications.
- **Sun Bucks**
 - Angela and Kourtney experienced significant difficulties activating the cards and connecting with customer service for assistance.
 - It is noted there have been difficulties with the automated system as the program is in its second year and still evolving.
- **Torch Technologies Grant**
 - There are no updates currently.

4. General Discussion Topics

- **Status of Recruitment**

- We have not heard back regarding the appointment requests that have been submitted to the County Executives' office.
- Cora and her team are scheduled to meet with the County Executive in the coming weeks.

- **Committee Assignments**

- Jim accepted the position as chair of the finance committee.
- Additional updates will be made as new members join.
- Dan accepted the position as chair of the events and fundraising committee.
- CC will remain on events and fundraising committee.

5. New Business

- **2026 Goals**

- Andrée has asked members to start thinking about our goals for 2026.
- Please take some time to consider what you believe our key objectives should be for the upcoming year.
- Members discussed removing the matrix from the handbook and making it a stand-alone document. This would allow for more frequent updates.
- Andrée introduced a new goal to organize a backpack school supply giveaway.
- Members discussed new strategies for increasing our presence in the community and enhancing the visibility of our board.
- The department is in the process of partnering with local libraries to establish a presence and make our programs available to community members who may not be able to visit our local office.
- Members emphasized the importance of highlighting the positive initiatives our department is undertaking and ways we can effectively communicate this information to the community.
- Dan suggests the board explore the unbudgeted needs.
- Angela has suggested that we make some updates to the playroom to create a more inviting space. She will be overseeing this project and will begin looking for donations to support it.
- Members discuss sponsoring APS clients in December as this was successful last year.
- Angela Mangione moved, and Christine Gerhardt seconded for the board to: 1) Sponsor adult services for Christmas; 2) Decorate the Children's Playroom; 3) Co-Sponsor the Community Backpack giveaway for 2026; and provided \$1000 for the Pantry. The motion unanimously carried.

6. Old Business

- **Handbook Update**
 - N/A
- **Mini-Golf Fundraiser**
 - Remains Tabled.

7. Committee Reports

- CQI
 - No Report
- Finance
 - No Report
- Events and Fundraising
 - No Report
- Public Relations
 - No Report
- Board Administration
 - No Report
- Legislative
 - No Report

8. Action Items

- Committee Assignments
 - See notes above.

9. Next Meetings

- The November meeting will be held on November 20th, 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.

The next meeting will be **Thursday, November 20th, 2025, at 2. S. Bond Street, Suite 300, Bel Air, MD 21014**

Respectfully submitted by: Kristy Louvado