

**THI/SCI TRUST FUND
ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
February 10, 2022
Prepared By Ayanna Wilson**

CALL TO ORDER

Andrew Kuyoro, the Chair of the Board, called to order the regular meeting of the Traumatic Head and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund Advisory Board at 10:14 a.m. on February 10, 2022.

IN ATTENDANCE

Board Members: Andrew Kuyoro, Sherlyn Sullivan, Stephanie Fletcher, Gary Matherne, Dr. Michael Chafetz, Kenneth Alexander, Representative Lawrence A. "Larry" Bagley and Yvette Pacaccio

Board Members Not in Attendance: John Fanning, Melissa Bayham, Sen. Franklin Foil and Robert Chatelain

Agency Staff: Lora Bennett, Tonia Gedward, Ayanna Wilson, Frances Landry-Rippy and John Korduner

Contractors: Kimberly Hill

Public: None

BOARD MEETING ATTENDEES INTRODUCTIONS

Board Members and others in attendance introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The board reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting held on November 14, 2021. Andrew asked if anyone had any comments about the minutes. Gary Matherne moved to accept the minutes. Dr. Chafetz seconded. The meeting minutes were approved as presented.

PROGRAM UPDATES / BUDGET-FINANCIAL REPORT – SHERLYN SULLIVAN

Dr. Chafetz asked if the legislators had achieved any accomplishments since the last meeting. Senator Bagley apologized for not following up on this matter. Sherlyn stated that it wasn't anyone's fault. She stated that we (OAAS) were supposed to schedule a meeting with Sen. Bagley and our executive management before the next meeting but before we can schedule the meeting, we need approval from LDH executive management. She stated she has been in constant contact with the executive office and gave them all types of information. She stated Sen. Foil asked some questions since the last board meeting and we answered those questions. She stated we had a lot of ideas on how to increase the funding but none of them panned out from

both sides. She stated she thinks the next step is for everyone to meet and talk about what can be done at this point. She stated it's been very busy and we are still working on resolving this issue. Mr. Matherne asked if it would be possible to tap into some of the federal COVID funds for at least this year to carry us through. Sherlyn said we tried that but the answer was no because we have a lot of federal dollars coming in but they are already assigned to other things. Also, most of the funds must go towards Medicaid-funded programs and the THSCI Trust Fund is not a Medicaid-funded program.

Mr. Kuyoro asked how much funding is needed to cover the shortfall. Sherlyn stated that we currently have a \$600,00 shortfall just to cover our current costs. She stated that if we had another \$400,000 (in addition to the \$600,000) we could start opening new cases (from the application waitlist). She stated we need about \$1 million. Sen. Bagley suggested asking the Secretary for the funding. Sherlyn stated that is the conversation we have been attempting to have with Sen. Foil and Rep. Bagley, our Secretary and Deputy Secretary but we have not managed to do so as of today. She stated that she will try again after the board meeting to get the meeting on the books so that we can have a robust discussion. Sherlyn asked Tonia to send the information that was sent to Sen. Foil to Rep. Non-Medicaid Related. Bagley, so he will have some talking points. Rep. Bagley stated he would follow the procedures but we need to find a recurring revenue stream. Sherlyn stated the only thing we can think of so far is to increase the fees because they're so low and haven't been updated in 25 years. She stated we understand that will be the next fiscal session. She stated the short-term solution is to find \$1 million in our agency, if possible. The long-term solution will be to increase the fees with legislative backing.

Mr. Kuyoro asked if we increase the fees, how much will we be generating. He stated we want to do it once and for all, maybe double for another 10 years down the road. He asked what is the current rate versus what are we proposing. He added maybe this is something the legislators can process, so we try to tie all these things together without letting the ball drop anywhere. He asked if anyone had any comments or suggestions of how we can overcome this obstacle. He asked how much are we proposing to increase the fees and how much revenue will be generated based on the increase. Sherlyn stated we are currently collecting about \$1.2 million, so if we doubled the fees we will presumably collect twice as much money. She stated we are hoping to get at least another million. She added we have talked about different ways to increase the fees, but nothing has been approved. Dr. Chafetz suggested writing a letter highlighting program achievements and the kinds of good work that we do. He stated that we should give this information to the Secretary and other legislators as a public relations type brief, signed by everybody on the board. He added this would be the documentation that might actually document the achievements, why we have a shortfall and why the increase in funding is necessary. Sherlyn stated it would not hurt anything if the board would get together and write a letter showing support. She stated she would certainly get the letter to Dr. Phillips.

Sherlyn stated that the financial spreadsheet shows we were projected to collect \$1.2 million but we are projected to spend \$1.7 million this year. She said the bottom line to all of this is that we are short. She added no one has given the go-ahead to use state funds to cover it, but she plans to use it this year. She said that is only a short-term solution. She added they are not going to expect to bail the program out year after year, so that is why we need a long-term solution. She asked if anyone had any questions.

PROGRAM STATUS – TONIA GEDWARD

There are 296 applicants on the waitlist as of 1/31/22, Tonia said that we are not reviewing any applicants for eligibility at this time. Based on the budget projections, the program will not be able to provide services to any additional individuals from the waitlist. They will remain on the waitlist until additional funding is available.

Application Year	Number of Appl.
2018	74
2019	100
2020	63
2021	48
2022	11

Tonia informed the board that since the last board meeting, the program received 107 Participant Services Plans (PSP); issued 94 Purchase Authorizations; reviewed 98 annual assessment documents; released (authorized) 251 payments to vendors; reviewed 21 (approved and denied) new applications and processed 86 Caseload Change requests and requests to mail new applications. She stated application and caseload change requests consist of the following: She said the program received 6 requests to update participant information, 8 requests for new applications; and the program mailed the requested applications to the individuals. She also said the program received 28 requests to close participant cases, 5 requests to transfer participant cases to another region, 33 to update the participant's Responsible Representative information and 6 requests to reinstate a participant's case.

She explained the support coordinators submit Participant Service Plans to the program to request goods and services on behalf of the participant. These requests consist of goods and services such as wheelchairs, medical supplies, home modifications, and assistive devices.

She stated the Annual Assessment Documents are received from the participant's support coordinator on an annual basis. The assessment document is a standardized assessment of each participant's functional capabilities and health needs.

She said the Payments Released to Vendors are based on PSP's that were previously approved. The vendor has since delivered the goods and/or services and provided an invoice requesting payment.

In other process improvement efforts, Tonia stated as always, we continue to improve our internal processes. She stated that the payment processing times have improved from months to weeks, and now they are processing payments within 2-5 business days with 3 days being the average processing times.

She stated we continue to update policy and procedures to better serve program participants.

Tonia stated that we still need to fill two board member seats [President of the Louisiana State Medical Society (LSMS) or designee]. She has been in contact with LSMS, but as of today, they have not found a replacement. Also, [the President of the Louisiana Hospital Association or designee]. Kenneth Alexander, who was previously appointed as the designee for the board

position, is now retired. Meaghan, the Executive Assistant to the President & CEO, states they are currently interviewing individuals for Mr. Alexander's old position. They will let her know once the position is filled.

BIALA – KIMBERLY HILL

Kimberly stated their helpline has remained consistent receiving on average 28 calls per month. Their website continues to receive good traction with an average of 1,322 page views per month. She stated with the spike of COVID at the end of 2021 and into January 2022, their statewide outreach returned to phone calls, emails, Zoom calls, social media, newsletter, website, and email blasts. She added a few in-person meetings occurred, but for now, most have stopped.

She stated that since the last meeting, they have had a heavy focus on planning and sharing information about their annual conference with professionals, caregivers, and individuals with brain and spinal cord injuries. The event is on March 25-26 in New Orleans, where BIALA will follow all Orleans Parish mandates regarding COVID. She stated the conference has attracted more sponsors and exhibitors than ever, including many new ones, which is exciting because they will provide education and resources about their services and products to all who attend. She stated they will be having a survivor day on Friday, March 25 with speakers sharing topics relevant to individuals living with brain and spinal cord injuries.

Kimberly added thanks to a generous donation by the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, United Spinal Association offered the opportunity for people impacted by Hurricane Ida to apply for individual disaster relief grants. She stated due to the enormous task of processing applications, they have been helping the national organizations. Roofs have been replaced/repared, home equipment has been purchased, wheelchairs have been replaced and damaged homes have been fixed. She added over \$300,000 has been provided in disaster relief grants.

Kimberly informed the board that their main priority since Tonia sent the updated trust fund application in January has been to distribute the updated TH/SCI application around the state. They are also using this opportunity to update their hospital contacts and share information about BIALA. Case managers in hospitals are constantly changing jobs so they are trying to connect with new individuals to share all of their information. She said that connecting with new rehab hospitals opening around the state has been a priority as well as continuing to update their resource guide.

Kimberly stated that on behalf of the board of directors and staff of BIALA, we thank you for your continued support. She stated that because of your support, BIALA will continue its mission to be the statewide resource for people impacted by brain and/or spinal cord injury.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

FUTURE MEETINGS

The next board meeting is scheduled for May 12, 2022, at 10:00 a.m., normally held at PACE, 7436 Bishop Ott Dr., Baton Rouge, LA 70806. However, due to the pandemic, the location will be determined before May 1st.

2022 THSCI ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS:

- **May 12, 2022**
- **August 11, 2022**
- **November 10, 2022**

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 10:49 a.m.