

**THI/SCI TRUST FUND  
ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES  
May 13, 2021  
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 10:16 a.m. on May 13, 2021.

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Board Members: Andrew Kuyoro, Sherlyn Sullivan, Stephanie Fletcher, Dr. Beth Arredondo, Gary Matherne, Dr. Michael Chafetz, Kenneth Alexander, Representative Lawrence A. "Larry" Bagley and Teresa Milner (designee for Melissa Bayham)

Board Members Not in Attendance: Dr. John Fanning, Senator Franklin Foil, Thomas Loupe, and Hazel Odom

Agency Staff: Tonia Gedward, Lora Bennett, Ayanna Wilson, 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 last meeting held on February 12, 2021. Andrew asked if anyone had any comments about the minutes. Kenneth Alexander moved to accept the minutes. Dr. Arredondo seconded. The meeting minutes were approved as presented.

**PROGRAM UPDATES – SHERLYN SULLIVAN**

Sherlyn started with the proposed THSCI Fund Protection Legislation. She stated we talked about this in our last meeting briefly about three months ago. She stated at the time we were hoping that Chairman Bagley or Senator Foil would offer a bill that would help to protect the program funds. She stated since that time, they stated that they can only submit five bills each and both had already committed to five bills. Sherlyn stated that (based on the information) it is not going to happen this year. She explained that OAAS had to make some tough decisions internally and externally about how the agency was going to move forward. She stated that the program is spending more than it is collecting at the moment. This has been since COVID; the funding has been down due to the municipalities not writing tickets or having court.

Sherlyn said we had some tough conversations with our contractors. We've had to cut our contractors, across the board, by 20% until we can see the collections at a steady increase. She stated that the program was hoping to eliminate the waitlist by opening every case by the beginning of this year, but we have had to stop opening cases due to COVID. She said the program cannot open cases until the funding increases. Sherlyn said that the last applications that we reviewed and opened from the waitlist were applications received in 2017. She stated that the program is in a bad situation. We are still asking Chairman Bagley and Senator Foil to author some legislation next year. She stated we are actively trying to figure out how to fix this problem that was initiated by COVID.

Chairman Bagley stated this was the only time they could run financial bills. The next time will be the year after next. He stated we can figure out something that is non-fiscal that we can run. He said he is in favor of doing what he can. His committee, House Health, and Welfare do what they can to help take care of these types of situations. He stated additional fees were not passing this year so he was not sure if a fee would have worked anyway. He went on to say that he wanted to get involved; however, the timing just wasn't right. He did not find out about this bill until a few months ago. He stated he would need to know about any bill that is needed at least 6 to 8 months in advance to prepare. He explained that it was not that he did not want to help, but that his hands were tied to promises that were already made. Sherlyn clarified that no one is to blame in the situation. She wanted to have this conversation, with the board, in an attempt to find some type of resolution.

Chairman Bagley stated he is willing to work on this and bring it to the legislature. He suggested that we need some kind of plan that would talk about how it is going to be funded. He stated he would need time to present it to the people who will be paying the fee to see what kind of feedback he will receive. He also stated that the alcohol distributors have a large and powerful lobby. He said this is not something that can be easily done. It will take some time and groundwork to get this done. Sherlyn stated that the alcohol tax was just an option that Senator Foil mentioned as a possible option.

Sherlyn went on to say that it may or may not be easier to just update the current amount of fees that the program receives for DUI, speeding, and reckless driving. She believes that the fees have been the same since this bill was first authored back in 1983. She said that we could try to get the fees increased by just changing the statute. She stated it would be easier to update the statute to some current numbers since it has not been updated in over 20 years. Chairman Bagley stated anytime you mention a fee, people immediately start saying no.

Chairman Bagley stated that he could talk to LDH's Secretary, Dr. Phillips, about adding some type of way for the program to get more money. He went on to say that it would not be fiscally related so it would just come from LDH, which would be easier. Mr. Alexander asked if the COVID relief dollars, coming from the state, could be some type of relief fund for the trust fund. Chairman Bagley stated COVID relief funds would be the way he would go to LDH. He needs to know how much money and what the money is going to go to and the purpose. However, he would need assistance explaining what we need and why we need it. Sherlyn stated that she would start that conversation with her superior, Dr. Lopez, first, before elevating it up to Dr. Phillips. She would like to ensure the conversations start internally first. Once it's elevated up to

Dr. Phillips, she will let Dr. Phillips know that Chairman Bagley supports the idea as well. Mr. Kuyoro stated we need a short-term and long-term goal. He suggests that we (the board) talk about the updates in the next meeting.

### **BUDGET/FINANCIAL REPORT – SHERLYN SULLIVAN**

Sherlyn asked everyone to review the financial report. She stated that we have collected a little over \$1 million through April and our projections through June are \$1.2 million. She explained that we are projected to spend \$2 million, therefore, about our expenditure, we are \$800 thousand short of our collections this year. She stated that luckily we had some carryover funds from last year, before COVID, that we were able to use to supplement what is happening this year. However, it does not completely cover the expenses. She stated that if we spend all the carryover money from last year, we will not have anything for next year. That is a huge part of our problem and why we were required to have tough conversations with our contractors. This is also the reason why we are having to look internally to cut costs and delay the progress of opening cases on the waitlist. She stated that we told the contractors that once we see the collections go back up, the plan is to open new cases. When we open cases again, obviously we will have to go back up on the contracts because they will be doing more work. She stated we have a problem and we are trying to fix it.

Mr. Alexander asked if the contracts were flex-pay contracts or flat monthly rates per region. Sherlyn explained that each contractor is receiving flat monthly rates per region. She went on to explain that the contractors are doing the same work; however, they are not physically going into the client's home due to COVID. Mr. Alexander suggested that the program increase the amount of money deducted from the contracts so that BIALA's contract can stay "whole." He stated that he was just trying to make a case because of the value the resource center brings to the program. Sherlyn stated that although she can appreciate Mr. Alexander's concerns, that this is an across-the-board cut, including cuts to contractors doing direct case management work and that these cuts are necessary. Sherlyn went on to say that she has discussed this with Kim at BIALA and that even though it is a tough situation that Kim understood. Tonia added that although they are not traveling as much, the amount of requests for goods and services and annual assessments submitted by the contractors on behalf of the participants has not changed. She stated that they are doing the same type of work, but just in a different way. Mr. Kuyoro asked, besides the 20% cut, what will the program need to do to take care of the deficit. Sherlyn said that Tonia and Lora Bennett, the Budget Director, had some internal discussions about the deficit and decided that we will cover it with state general funds.

Sherlyn asked if anyone had any other questions about the financial statement. Tonia added that she has been closely looking at incoming requests to mitigate wasteful spending. She stated that a lot of times, we have participants asking for 3 or 4 items when they only need one. She is making sure that the program is not approving those types of requests. If the participant needs those additional items down the line, then she will revisit the request and approve the items if needed. She stated that she and her staff are doing things, internally, to minimize wasteful spending.

### **PROGRAM STATUS – TONIA GEDWARD**

Tonia started by informing the Board that Ebony Thomas will be starting with the program on May 17, 2021, as the THSCI Trust Fund Waiver Subject Matter Expert. Ms. Thomas has many years of experience as a support coordinator. She stated her primary focus will be working with waiver support coordinators who have participants who are enrolled in Medicaid waiver programs as well as the THSCI Trust Fund program.

She stated currently the Trust Fund is serving 554 participants. Since the last board meeting, the program closed 7 cases that were previously eligible. Cases are generally closed due to the participant expending his/her funds or the participant passed away.

As of 5/12/21, there are 254 applicants on the waitlist. 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 any time soon. They will remain on the waitlist until additional funding is available.

Since the last board meeting, the program received 115 Participant Services Plans (PSP); 91 annual assessment documents; created 101 Purchase Authorizations; released (authorized) 245 payments to vendors; and reviewed 17 (approved and denied) applications.

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 documents 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 stated the Payments Released to Vendors are based on PSPs 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 on our internal processes. We continue to update policy and procedures to better serve program participants.

Tonia informed the board that Ayanna Wilson, an Administrative Program Specialist of the program, researched the deposits made in April to determine why our collections increased from March to April. She stated based on her research, it appears the municipalities reported more tickets. She said we can only assume this is because the governor lifted some of the COVID-related restrictions. She went on to say, we are ecstatic to see the increase; however, we will continue to closely monitor the monthly collections to see if the increase will be consistent over the next several months.

Tonia informed the board that there are two board member seats that the board should consider replacing. Neither of the two board members in these seats has attended more than one meeting since 2018. She stated it is very difficult to ensure that there is a quorum each meeting when there are members who never attend meetings.

She went on to explain, the first seat is the Survivor of a Spinal Cord Injury individual appointed by the Governor. This seat is held by Mr. Thomas Loupe. He was appointed on 3/29/20 and attended one meeting in May of 2020. He has not attended any meetings since then and has not responded to any of the emails.

The second seat is the family member of a Survivor of a Traumatic Head Injury individual appointed by the Governor. This seat is currently held by Ms. Hazel Odom. She was appointed in October of 2016. She's attended one meeting since December of 2017. She has not responded to any of the emails. Ms. Odom's appointment expired on October 25, 2020, but it's been difficult trying to find someone willing to fill the seat. Tonia has sent letters to over 25 individuals as well as reached out to our support coordinators with no luck. Ms. Odom will remain in the seat until the board can replace her. Kim asked if Tonia heard from the candidates she suggested. Tonia stated she had not heard from them after two follow-ups. Ms. Fletcher stated she may have someone to replace these board members. She asked if she could email Tonia a couple of candidates.

### **BIALA – KIMBERLY HILL**

Kim stated the resource center has been very active lately, and their/her ability to visit places in person has been increasing. Whether in person, virtually, by email, hard mail, or by phone, they are constantly sharing support and pertinent resources with individuals with brain and/or spinal injuries, caregivers, and professionals around the state.

She stated a few hospitals have allowed in-person in-services over the past few months and new places offering resources have invited them to tour their facilities. She stated requests for trust fund applications have decreased a bit, but inquiries have increased asking about application status.

She informed the board that their helpline has remained consistent receiving on average 30 calls per month. Their website continues to receive good traction with an average of 1,700-page views per month. Their outreach continues around the state via phone calls, emails, Zoom calls, social media, newsletters, BIALA's website, and email blasts.

Kim stated at the beginning of May that they submitted an idea to a charitable trust for funding to create "resource backpacks" to provide to rehab hospitals for traumatic brain and/or spinal cord injury patients/caregivers. The goal of the backpacks is to provide concise, simple resources for caregivers that are needed right after any injury, including the TH/SCI application, along with some tangible contents that will be useful for both the caregiver and patient. Individuals with brain and spinal cord injuries helped determine the content of the backpacks, which will be injury-specific. She stated they were awarded funding for 200 – 225 backpacks.

She informed the board that their virtual support group meetings for individuals with spinal cord injuries and brain injuries have continued; where they have provided guest speakers on Zoom calls and/or support and social opportunities. Since February, they have also been offering monthly virtual exercise groups lead by a physical therapist and one of our board members. As

support groups are beginning to meet in person, much to the excitement of the members, they are gauging interest from participants about continuing their virtual groups. She stated the short video about the TH/SCI trust fund program they created continues to be shared monthly in their newsletter, on their social media platforms and is permanently on their website. She added, if you would like to view the video, you can find it on the following YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/AIrBNZ62vBI>. The video was approved by Tonia Gedward.

Kim stated that while their funding is being decreased, which they understand, they will continue to find new ways to provide resources and support to those they serve. BIALA will continue its mission to be the statewide resource for people impacted by the brain and/or spinal cord injury.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

None

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

#### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next board meeting is scheduled for August 12, 2021, 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 by August 1<sup>st</sup>.

2021 THSCI Advisory Board Meetings:  
Thursday, November 4, 2021

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 11:06 a.m.