



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 27, 2026

Board of Directors:

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Bill Reicherter, Carolina Raineau, Charles Hanna, Donna Korn, Dr. Heidi Schaeffer, Karen Cabrera, Maria Mezerhane, Michael DiBrizzi, Nancy W. Stamper, Paul Adams, Dr. Ronald Ford, Sabria McElroy, Stefanie Title, Dr. Victoria Thurston

Unable to Attend:

Bill Reicherter, Charles Hanna, Ronald Ford

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Rebecca Lindstadt, Shanny Tozzi, Tina Lewis, Deena Ponto, Sheryl Williams, Tara Daniels, Daffodil Otto, Dawn Warfle, Peter Santiago, Anasia Thomas, Cheveena Finnie, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Christy Gillis, Adrienne Reid, Traci Schweitzer, Isis Williams, *PBC Gov:* Elisa Cramer, *CBIZ:* Adam Firestein, Shelby Michels, *LerroSarbey:* Joey Epstein

CALL TO ORDER – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair

- Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Lois Marino, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The January 30, 2027 meeting minutes were reviewed. A *motion* was moved and seconded to approve the minutes. A *vote was taken*. The ayes have it and *the motion was adopted*.

CHILDNET BOARD EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD – Tina Lewis, HR Officer

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
 - November 2025 – Dawn Warfle, Dependency Case Manager Supervisor – Unit C2 (BWD)
 - January 2026 – Anasia Thomas, Dependency Case Manager – Unit A4 (BWD)
Cheveena Finnie – Dependency Case Manager – Unit B3 (BWD)

AUDIT PRESENTATION – Adam Firestein and Shelby Michels, CBIZ

- Donna Eprifania introduced Adam Firestein and Shelby Michels, now with CBIZ, to present the FY 2024–2025 audit, noting increased compliance demands and commending her team for managing a particularly rigorous process. The auditors praised ChildNet's finance team and reported an unmodified (clean) audit opinion on both the financial statements and single audit - the highest level of assurance - with no findings, material weaknesses, or compliance issues.



Financials were largely consistent with the prior year, with minor updates including expanded disclosures for donated goods and services, two new DCF contracts running through 2029, and an increased line of credit (unused) for liquidity purposes. The auditors confirmed ChildNet remains a low-risk auditee, with no prior or current findings. The governance letter further affirmed no disagreements with management, no fraud or legal violations, no significant deficiencies, and no unusual transactions. Overall, the audit was described as clean and uneventful, reflecting strong fiscal management and internal controls.

A motion was moved and seconded to approve the FY 2024-2025 Audit. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.

ITEMS FOR BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL

- **Board Candidate – Joe Rogers** – Joe Rogers is a former board member who termed out in April 2023 after many years on the board. Mr. Rogers has continued to serve as a non-board member on a few of ChildNet’s board committees. Mr. Rogers was very appreciative of being asked to rejoin ChildNet’s board.
- **Board Candidate – Kerry Diaz** – Ms. Diaz is president and founder of her consulting company. Ms. Diaz is a former CEO, attorney, foster parent, and nonprofit consultant.

A motion was moved and seconded to approve Joe Rogers and Kerry Diaz as the newest members of the Board of Directors. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.

- **Approval of Policies and Procedures:**
 - CN 001.005 – Confidentiality of Case Records
 - CN 004.026 – Non-Discrimination
 - CN 009.038 – Incentive Compensation

A motion was moved and seconded to approve the above noted Policies and Procedures. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.

NEW BUSINESS/BOARD TRAINING

- **Overview of the Child Welfare System** – Neiko Shea, COS, provided to the Board an overview of Florida’s child welfare system, emphasizing the role of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the shift to a community-based care (CBC) model. DCF remains the state authority, overseeing contracts, conducting investigations, approving foster homes, and monitoring performance, while CBC agencies, like ChildNet, manage local service delivery. This decentralized model, implemented in the early 2000s, allows for more flexible, community-driven approaches but is complex and challenging. The system operates under strict legal oversight, with courts and multiple attorneys involved in all decisions, and prioritizes goals such as child safety, permanency (ideally reunification), well-being, and family support. It relies on extensive collaboration among stakeholders, including service providers, schools, healthcare, and the legal system, to deliver a wide range of services and placement options. However, ongoing challenges include high staff turnover, shortages of foster homes, service gaps for youth with complex needs, legal and compliance demands, and funding constraints. Throughout, DCF maintains strong oversight through monitoring, quality assurance, and policy review to ensure accountability and system performance.



COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Community Engagement Committee – Lois Marino, Committee Chair and Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations**

The Community Engagement Committee team is actively pursuing grant opportunities, with about \$475,000 currently in applications, including both one-time and multi-year funding to ensure program sustainability. ChildNet is also building partnerships that provide in-kind support, such as donations and volunteer efforts, highlighted by a Leadership Broward project helping renovate the SafePlace facility while increasing community awareness and engagement. Additional efforts include organizing donation drives like the Easter basket campaign and preparing for upcoming graduation events for youth in care. The committee also emphasized the importance of their annual gala on May 9, noting strong sponsorship support that has already covered event costs, with additional funds going directly to services. Board members and the community are encouraged to continue promoting the event, securing sponsorships, donating auction items, and helping fill attendance to maximize fundraising impact.

Board Chair Report – Josefa Benjamin briefly shared an update to build on the excitement around the upcoming Gala, introducing a new initiative to recognize board members who go “beyond the boardroom.” This effort will highlight individuals who are personally involved in child welfare through fostering, adoption, or mentoring. The plan includes creating display posters featuring photos and stories of these board members alongside the children they have supported, as well as QR codes linking to more detailed stories or videos. These displays will be highlighted at the Gala to inspire attendees, demonstrate the board’s deeper commitment, and strengthen community engagement, with feedback welcome to refine the presentation.

- **Finance Committee – Michael Lepera, Committee Chair and Donna Eprifania, CFO**

Michael Lepera reported that the Finance Committee discussed several key financial topics. The main focus was on the risk pool and reserves. They reviewed the external audit, community alliance waiver status, and Broward County’s risk pool. Donna Eprifania provided an update on the interim financial statements for January 2026. The budget is balanced for most areas, except for Broward County, which continues to face a strain on residential group care services. Broward has approximately 41% of its budget remaining, and Palm Beach has 42%; where both should be in January. To address the Broward shortfall, ChildNet applied for a \$1.9 million risk pool allocation for Broward, but due to limited resources, only received \$172,000, a pro-rata portion of the overall request.

Risk Pool and Back of Bill Funding - Larry Rein explained the process surrounding the risk pool allocation from the Florida legislature. This year, the legislature allocated \$3 million to the risk pool, while requests from seven lead agencies, including ChildNet Broward, totaled over \$35 million. Due to limited funds, DCF allocated funds on a pro-rata basis, meaning ChildNet Broward only received about \$172,000 out of their \$1.9 million request, which is approximately 8% of the requested amount. Mr. Rein also discussed the “back-of-bill” funding, where the legislature can allocate additional funds at the end of the fiscal year if unspent funds are available. Mr. Rein noted that this type of funding helped cover funding gaps in previous years, though there is no guarantee it will happen again. The Speaker of the House has historically supported such allocations, especially for agencies with large shortfalls like Citrus Community Care, providing hope for additional funding. However, the process is unpredictable and depends on legislative decisions made behind closed doors.



▪ **Governance/Executive Committee – Rebecca Brock, Committee Chair**

- **Accreditation** – Larry Rein noted that the committee had previously agreed to explore whether other accreditations would be beneficial for ChildNet, with quarterly reports back to the board. He mentioned attending a meeting with Presidium, an accreditation organization, but noted that it was focused solely on policies and procedures related to sexual abuse among staff, which seemed too narrow and specific to pursue further.
- **Membership Recruitment** – Larry Rein reported that there is one other candidate, Samantha Ramnarine, and we hope to present her application at the next board meeting. Mr. Rein also noted that following changes to the bylaws, the maximum number of board members had been increased to twenty-five. Currently, there are twenty members on the board, but we still have room for additional members if a valuable candidate is identified.
- **Strategic Plan** - Larry Rein provided an update on the strategic plan. He reminded the board that they had previously presented the results of the 3-year strategic plan and were beginning work on a new plan for the next three years. The three (3) initial strategic areas identified were:
 1. Stabilizing the workforce, particularly in dependency case management.
 2. Improving access to services for teens and children with complex needs.
 3. Financial stability.

However, after further discussions, the leadership team proposed adding a fourth strategic area:

4. Increasing foster home capacity.

Recent data showed a growing issue with placing younger children (under 12) after removal, leading to some children being placed in shelters, which is not ideal. This new focus aligns well with federal efforts to improve foster home capacity nationally. Mr. Rein reported that staff are working on detailed rationale and metrics to monitor progress, and we hope to present a more substantial plan in the next month.

▪ **Legal/Human Resources Committee – Rebecca Brock, Committee Chair**

The committee reviewed ongoing compliance activities, noting that a compliance committee - established to meet Sunshine contract requirements - has been actively working on the annual compliance plan, risk assessment, and monitoring plan, with an upcoming external review from Sunshine expected soon. They discussed conflict of interest disclosures, acknowledging full board compliance while continuing to follow up with employees and considering moving the annual deadline to July to improve completion rates. The board was also informed that annual compliance training will be launched shortly with a 30-day completion window and an April deadline. Additional updates included efforts to revise policies and procedures for clarity and alignment with current operations, the decision to move away from co-accreditation, and the retention of outside counsel for a specific incident. The committee continues to meet quarterly, has approved the 2026 fraud, waste, and abuse program, and is updating work and monitoring plans for the next fiscal year. Lastly, there was discussion about whether advisory members are required to complete compliance training, which remains under review.

▪ **Program Quality Committee – Nancy W. Stamper, Committee Chair**

Nancy Stamper reported that the committee met on February 11 and advanced three policies to the board, which have already been presented. They also reviewed contract monitoring outcomes, noting there were no unexpected findings, with details available in the board materials. Larry Rein



discussed census trends, highlighting a noticeable increase in the number of children being removed in both Broward and Palm Beach counties during the first half of the fiscal year. While still below historical highs, the rise is significant - particularly in Broward, where removals are occurring more at the investigative "front end," and in Palm Beach, where increases are split between initial investigations and in-home cases. Mr. Rein emphasized the need to further analyze these trends and collaborate with DCF to understand underlying causes, as the recent spike was described as concerning despite not yet reaching crisis levels.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **Statewide Issues** – Larry Rein reported on significant developments in the state legislature regarding child welfare funding. Both the House and Senate released initial appropriations bills that maintain flat funding levels for community-based care lead agencies, with limited or unclear support for the long-developed funding allocation model. A major concern is proposed changes to carry-forward funds: currently, agencies can retain up to 8% of their total contract across multiple years, but the Senate is proposing eliminating carry-forward entirely and reclaiming existing funds, while the House suggests limiting it to 8% of a single year's allocation. Leadership emphasized that these changes would severely impact agencies' financial stability, cash flow, and ability to maintain services, noting that past carry-forward funds have been critical for covering deficits and enhancing services. There is concern that the state may use reclaimed funds to support a proposed funding model increase. ChildNet is actively advocating to preserve current carry-forward provisions, as this issue is seen as highly consequential for operations and service quality moving forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT

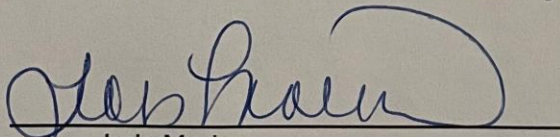
- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

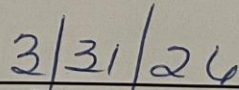
- March 27, 2026 @ 8:00 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:47 a.m.



Lois Marino
Board Secretary



Date

(Corporate Seal)