



# ANNUAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**June 27, 2025**

**Board of Directors:**

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

**Unable to Attend:**

Bill Reicherter, Paul Adams, Victoria Thurston

**Other Attendees:**

*ChildNet Staff:* Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Rebecca Lindstadt, Deena Ponto, Nicole Slade, Tina Lewis, Noelle Brillembourg, Daffodil Otto, Lisa Nugent, Annie Walker, Hope Sites, Cindy Sherman, Nastasha Cook, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer, Adrienne Reid

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**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 April 25, 2025 and May 15, 2025 meeting minutes were reviewed. *A motion* was moved and seconded to approve both meeting minutes. *A vote was taken.* The ayes have it and *the motion was adopted.*

**CHILDNET BOARD EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD – Tina Lewis, Human Resources Officer**

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
  - April 2025 – Lisa Nugent, Transporter (PB)  
Nastasha Cook, Dependency Case Manager – Unit C4 (BWD)
  - May 2025 – Hope Sites, Lead Foster Home Recruitment Coordinator (PB)  
Leisa Harriott, Dependency Case Manager – Unit B2 (BWD)

**OLD BUSINESS/BOARD RETREAT UPDATE – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair**

- **Mission Statement** – Col. Benjamin reported that the May 2025 Board Retreat was a success, achieving its goal of updating the organization's mission statement. The new proposed mission is:

*“Leading communities in protecting and serving abused and neglected children by supporting and strengthening their families.”*

This revision reflects the organization's broader focus on supporting families as well as children. A motion on the updated mission statement will be presented later.

- **Board Financial Responsibility** – The updated Board of Directors’ Role and Expectations formalized “board financial responsibility”. The new language requires each board member to contribute to ChildNet’s financial well-being through direct personal giving and/or facilitation of external contributions, with a minimum commitment of \$2,000 per director per fiscal year.

## NEW BUSINESS

### • BOARD SERVICE – Alcolya St. Juste, CLO & CCO

- Approval of Resolution #280 – Election of New Board Directors – The following names were brought to the Board for approval as the newest Board of Directors:
  - Board Candidate – Karen Cabrera
  - Board Candidate – Michael DiBrizzi – Provider Representative

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Karen Cabrera and Michael DiBrizzi, as provider representative, as the newest members of the Board of Directors. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

- Approval of Resolutions #281 - #284 – Election of Officers – The following names were brought to the Board for vote for Officer Positions for a one (1) year reappointment, ending June 2026:
  - *Chair* – Col. Josefa Benjamin
  - *Vice Chair* – Rebecca Brock
  - *Treasurer* – Michael Lepera
  - *Secretary* – Lois Marino

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolutions #281-#284 for reappointment of one (1) year, ending June 2026. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

- Approval of Resolution #285 – Election of Directors – two-year reappointment – The following slate of Directors are up for reappointment of a two (2) year term ending June 2027:
 

○ Bill Reicherter	○ Dr. Heidi Schaeffer	○ Paul Adams
○ Carolina Raineau	○ Karen Cabrera	○ Sabria McElroy
○ Chelsea Bellew	○ Maria Mezerhane	○ Stefanie Title
○ Donna Korn	○ Michael DiBrizzi	○ Dr. Victoria Thurston

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #285 for re-appointment of two (2) years, ending June 2027. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

- Approval of Resolution #286 – Election of Directors – less than two-year reappointment – The following Directors are up for reappointment of less than a two (2) year term. The reappointment is noted as follows:
  - Dr. Ronald Ford – 1 year, 3 months – ending September 2026
  - Nancy Gregoire Stamper – 1 year, 11 months – ending May 2027

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #286 for re-appointment of less than two (2) years as noted above. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

### • ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR APPROVAL – Alcolya St. Juste, CLO & CCO

- Approval of Resolution #287 – Amended ByLaws – Discussion was held by Alcolya St. Juste that the ByLaws were updated with a more defined standard for selecting provider representatives.

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #287. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

- Approval of Resolution #288 – ChildNet’s New Mission Statement – Discussion was held by Alcolya St. Juste that at the May 2025 Board Retreat, a new mission statement, *“Leading communities in protecting and serving abused and neglected children by supporting and strengthening their families”* was created to show ChildNet’s broader focus on supporting families as well as children

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #288. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

- Approval of Resolution #289 – Updated BOD Role and Expectations – Discussion was held that the updated Role and Expectations includes the updated mission statement *“Leading communities in protecting and serving abused and neglected children by supporting and strengthening their families”* and modifies the expectation that each Board Director is fully committed to contributing to the financial well-being of ChildNet in a manner commiserate with one’s ability through direct personal giving and/or facilitation of external contributions for a minimum of \$2,000 per director per fiscal year.

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #289. A vote was taken. The ayes have*

- Approval of Resolution #290 – Compliance with License Requirements, Regulations and Decrees – Discussion was held by Alcolya St. Juste that this annual compliance check is to ensure that all ChildNet licenses are in place.

*A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #290. A vote was taken. The ayes have*

- **ANNUAL UPDATE – Alcolya St. Juste, CLO & CCO**

- Discussion of Sunshine Law – Alcolya St. Juste reminded the Board that under Florida’s Sunshine Law, all meetings must be open to the public, minutes must be maintained and accessible, and no private discussions (including electronic communications) should occur during meetings. Any ChildNet business discussions must remain public and observable. Julie Janello will send a link/video to the Board from the Inspector General that discusses Sunshine Law.
- FY 2024-2025 - Board/Committee Meeting Calendar, Board Roster/Contact List, Board Committee Structure and Membership, Summary of Board Committees and Board Bios – These documents were updated and provided to the Board. Ms. St. Juste noted that there will not be Board or Committee meetings in the months of July and December, unless otherwise requested by the Board Chair. The Board was asked to review their bio and provide Julie Janello with any changes.
- Annual Acknowledgement Form for Potential Conflict of Interest – Annually, each Board member is to complete the Acknowledgement Form to note any conflicts of interest. Julie Janello will email the form to the full Board for completion.
- Review Management of Operational Procedures (MOP) – Julie DeMar, CPO, presented ChildNet’s annual review of operational procedures, fulfilling COA Board oversight requirements. The review covered internal and external monitoring of policies and procedures, with only procedural updates made this year and one policy pending finalization. A fiscal monitoring corrective action required re-procurement of adoption and independent living services; contracts are pending, after which the item will close. No other corrective actions exist for Palm Beach or Broward. Executive team members oversee policies, with updates reviewed by the Program Quality Committee. ChildNet achieved expedited reaccreditation in 2022 with no concerns, renewed its child-placing agency license in May 2025 without issues, and updated policies due to the Sunshine Health contract transition. Overall, the review demonstrated strong compliance and positive outcomes.
- Strategic Planning Board Training – Neiko Shea, COS, led a training on Strategic Planning, noting that ChildNet is in the final year of its three-year plan and must begin preparing for the next. The board and senior leadership will collaborate on the process, with the board overseeing progress. The



new plan should align with the recently updated mission, focus on continuous improvement, risk mitigation, and quality service delivery, while remaining mindful of emergency response needs. The current goals focus on workforce sustainability, expanding placement and treatment options, and supporting kinship caregivers; the board must now determine which to continue and what new priorities to add.

- Overview of the Child Welfare System Board Training – Neiko Shea, COS, provided training on Florida’s Child Welfare System, explaining DCF oversight and the role of Community-Based Care (CBC) lead agencies like ChildNet. She described the shift from a centralized to a privatized model, with 16 CBCs serving the state, noting that ChildNet is one of the larger agencies. Ms. Shea reviewed the dependency court process, emphasizing reunification as the primary goal, with adoption or termination of parental rights used only when necessary. She highlighted ChildNet’s coordinating role across legal, service, educational, and medical partners, focusing on prevention, safety, permanency, child well-being, and family well-being, while recognizing challenges such as workforce turnover, placement shortages, and legal complexities. DCF continues to monitor CBC performance, finances, and compliance..

## COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

- FY 2024-2025 Summary – Lois Marino reported that the committee focuses on connecting the community with ChildNet through awareness, advocacy, volunteering, and donations. This year, two major events, the PB luncheon and Broward Cocktails and Cheers, netted about \$220,000. Targeted donations, such as holiday drives, laptops, and other in-kind contributions, added approximately \$360,000, while individual discretionary donations contributed nearly \$10,000. In total, the committee helped raise approximately \$590,000 to support children and families. While the results are strong, there is room to further optimize community engagement and fundraising efforts.
- Grants and Funding – Lois Marino presented the annual update on ChildNet’s grants and diversified funding sources beyond state or agency support. Over the past year, the organization secured more than \$1 million through new, renewed, and multi-year grants, supporting children and families in collaboration with community partners. Emphasizing the importance of relationship-building, Ms. Marino highlighted partnerships with entities like UnitedHealthcare, Florida Blue, Northern Trust, and in-kind contributors such as Mobile School Pantry. While some funding comes through event sponsorships, cultivating larger grants often requires time and ongoing engagement. Board members were encouraged to actively participate in fostering connections to expand funding opportunities.
- FY 2025-2026 Board Call to Action:
  - 1) Bring new people to ChildNet events and introduce them to ChildNet, 2) Arrange tours or set up meetings with Larry Rein and/or Neiko Shea to educate guests, 3) Follow and share ChildNet’s social media posts to increase awareness of events and in-kind drives (e.g., Thanksgiving, back-to-school), 4) Engage and cultivate corporate partnerships to involve employees in events, drives, and contributions, 5) Share grant or funding opportunities learned from other boards or community connections with ChildNet staff, and 6) Pass along potential sponsorships or donation opportunities to ChildNet staff, who will handle the requests.

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

Donna Eprifania reported that the FY 2025-2026 budget is pending the governor’s approval, after which the Finance Committee will review it in July, and the full board will ratify in August 2025. Palm Beach is on budget with support from reserve funds, while Broward faces a deficit, requiring efficiency measures and structural changes. The reserve fund, created in earlier strategic plans, has been critical in covering



\$2.4 million in cash shortfalls, and additional relief is expected through an approved risk pool application once the state budget is finalized. Despite this, ChildNet remains dependent on roll-forward funds and risk pool support to balance operations. Rising residential group care costs - now \$362/day in Palm Beach and \$320/day in Broward - are a significant challenge, making census reduction a key strategic goal. The board also formally renamed the contingency fund as the "Reserve Fund".

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

- **Resignation of Meghan Russell** – We received notification from Meghan Russell that due to personal reasons, she was resigning from the Board effective 05-09-25.
- **Membership Recruitment** - Larry Rein noted that due to a Palm Beach board member relocating to Broward, Broward now has 9 members while Palm Beach has 8 members. Therefore, the current vacancy is in Palm Beach. Lois Marino has been in touch with potential candidates who previously expressed interest, and discussions will continue to gauge their willingness to join. Since there is no July board meeting, the Governance/Executive Committee may be asked to approve moving forward with an application process for a Palm Beach candidate.

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

Donna Eprifania presented a modification to the Tuition Reimbursement policy: ChildNet will continue supporting staff pursuing relevant education but will lower the maximum reimbursement from \$3,500 to \$2,500 per year to fit budget constraints. Participants must commit to one additional year of service or repay a prorated amount if they leave early. New pre-approval measures are being considered to ensure funding and degree eligibility are confirmed upfront. The committee also heard Julie DeMar's report on operational procedures and an update from Andrew Wallick, Director of Service Quality, on adolescent care coordinators, which was included in the board materials.

- **Real Estate AdHoc Committee – Donna Korn, Committee Chair**

Donna Korn updated the board on the committee's review of ChildNet's real estate strategy, noting that research has expanded beyond lease vs. purchase to include space utilization, location, and service quality impacts. While lease costs have been compared to potential purchase scenarios, factors such as long-term leases, restrictions on using state funds for property purchases, and the need for capital fundraising limit immediate action. The committee is also considering facility wish lists for both counties. Ms. Korn praised staff, especially Donna Eprifania, for their detailed work, which has improved the board's understanding of real estate costs and fiscal responsibility. Carolina Raineau was acknowledged for her ongoing contributions to branding efforts.

## **BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin**

- **Board Committee Selection** – Col. Benjamin reviewed committee participation, noting that while all members are engaged on committees, the only vacancy is on the Audit Committee. New member Karen Cabrera joined the Finance committee and Carolina Raineau joined the Community Engagement committee, but someone still needs to volunteer for Audit. The role was described as a minimal time commitment (2-3 meetings per year, August-December), serving as oversight while staff and auditors manage most of the work. Donna Eprifania, CFO, emphasized its importance but limited scope, and Michael Lepera clarified that a finance background is not required, encouraging broader participation.
- **Broward Graduation** - The Broward graduation honored over 90 graduates, including those earning associate and bachelor's degrees. Highlights included a graduate walking the stage with her two children and a keynote speaker who shared her story of adopting three siblings. Seventeen graduates had already enrolled in college and were recognized with laptops from ChildNet.





- **Kinship Care** - Kinship care, which is Strategic Goal #3, focuses on ways to strengthen support for identifying relatives and directing more funding toward the initiative. Kinship care is significantly less costly than group foster care and often yields better outcomes for children, as illustrated by the graduate noted above who cared for her three siblings. Col. Benjamin emphasized the importance of collectively prioritizing and expanding efforts in this area.
- **Call to Action and Reflection** – Col. Benjamin offered a reflection and call to action, thanking long-serving members for laying the foundation and welcoming new members for joining the current momentum. Members were encouraged to maintain the board’s energy, continue advancing its work, and function as ambassadors for ChildNet by raising awareness, communicating the agency’s responsibilities, and speaking with a unified voice in the community. Appreciation was expressed for all contributions, both visible and behind the scenes.

### CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **Federal Issues** – Larry Rein reported on federal and national child welfare issues. Currently, there are no expected federal funding cuts for foster care, though potential changes to adult Medicaid and SNAP eligibility could indirectly affect families. Children in foster care remain exempt from these changes. Florida’s community-based care system remains the most advanced in the nation, though challenges like funding allocation and serving high-acuity children are common across states. A national meeting in Pensacola will convene leaders to share strategies for addressing the needs of complex cases. Liability insurance costs and availability remain a major concern. Other states, such as Texas and Missouri, have passed legislation to potentially alleviate these issues, and Florida may explore similar measures in the future.
- **Legislative Update** – Larry Rein provided an update on the Florida Legislature’s session. Although a statewide increase in core child welfare funding did not pass, nearly \$20 million in “back of the bill” funds will cover deficits for seven lead agencies, including ChildNet Palm Beach’s \$4.6 million shortfall. This allocation, aided by Speaker Daniel Perez and last-minute negotiations, would fully fund Palm Beach if the governor approves the budget. While the process highlights the risks of relying on last-minute political decisions, it ensures stability for Palm Beach and sets the stage for continued work on a funding formula statewide.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

### NEXT MEETING DATE

- No meeting in July 2025. Next Board Meeting is Friday, August 29, 2025 at 8:00 a.m. in person and via Zoom.

### ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:58 a.m.

*Lois Marino*

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Lois Marino  
Board Secretary

9/3/25

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Date

(Corporate Seal)