



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

August 29, 2025

Board of Directors:

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Bill Reicherter, Carolina Raineau, 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, Carolina Raineau, Karen Cabrera, Michael Lepera

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Rebecca Lindstadt, Nicole Slade, Sheryl Williams, Noelle Brillembourg, Jorge Chapa, Joe Mbwambo, Tanisha McLamore, Manoucheca Satine-Luc, Nyasha Nedd Wright, Ashley Mitchell, Kendalese Rose, Yazmin Martinez, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer, *PB County:* Elisa Cramer

CALL TO ORDER – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair

- Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Lois Marino, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The June 27, 2025 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, Director of HR

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
 - June 2025 – Ashley Mitchell, Dependency Case Manager, Unit D2 (BWD)
Yazmin Martinez, Transporter (PB)
 - July 2025 – Jorge H. Chapa, Dependency Case Manager, Unit 101 (PB)
Tanisha McLamore, Educational Services Specialist (BWD)

ITEM FOR BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL – Michael Lepera, Finance Chair and Donna Eprifania, CFO

- **Resolutions #292 and #293 – FY 2025-2026 Budget – Broward and Palm Beach** – Donna Eprifania presented the FY 2025–26 Broward budget (Resolution #292) for board approval prior to submission to the Department of Children and Families. The Finance Committee reviewed and finalized the budget on 07-23-25, incorporating a required \$100,000 reserve in Broward and \$50,000 reserve in Palm Beach for unanticipated expenditures. The total Broward budget is \$94.66 million, supported by \$1 million in ChildNet reserves, along with grants and contracts including Sunshine Health, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, and BBX. Key cost drivers include child placements, budgeted at 124 children daily at \$320 per day (up



from \$308 the prior year), with a target of 115 to maintain balance. The budget was developed using third-quarter projections and service utilization trends.

- Donna Eprifania presented the FY 2025–26 Palm Beach budget (Resolution #293) of \$62.56 million for approval. The county ended last year with a \$3.9 million back-of-bill payment and a small surplus, though reserves of \$350,000 are still needed to balance the new budget. Group care is budgeted for 95 children at \$362 per day, with a target of 91 to maintain balance. Funding relies on reserves and grants, including Sunshine Health, Youth at Work, and BBX.

A motion was moved and seconded to approve Resolution #292 – FY 2025-2026 Broward Budget and Resolution #293 – FY 2025-20206 Palm Beach Budget as discussed above. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- **Management Information Systems (MIS)** – Joseph Mbwambo, IT Officer, presented an overview of the MIS Department, highlighting its role in providing technology services, training, troubleshooting, system support, and infrastructure management to enhance staff efficiency and service to children and families. The department is structured into a help desk team and an infrastructure team, managing tickets, security, disaster recovery, and automation. Recent initiatives include expanding the Help Center to support legal and transportation requests, improving collaboration tools like Teams and SharePoint, and focusing on cybersecurity awareness. Board members thanked Joseph for his leadership since joining seven years ago, crediting him with building a secure, efficient, and customer-service oriented MIS department that has transformed responsiveness and innovation despite funding constraints.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

Lois Marino reported that several grant requests are pending with responses expected next month and she noted upcoming changes to next year's fundraising gala. Ms. Marino anticipates sharing more details soon. Additionally, it was noted that Karen Cabrera notified Josefa Benjamin that FPL may not host the annual nonprofit showcase this year, an event that ChildNet had planned to participate in.

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

Donna Eprifania reported on the following:

- **Reserve Fund** - Donna Eprifania reported that by the end of the fiscal year, \$782,000 in additional unrestricted funds were added to the existing \$3 million, bringing the total reserve to \$3.8 million. These reserves were crucial for maintaining cash flow, supporting payroll, and paying providers while awaiting risk pool and back-of-bill funding, with \$2.4 million used to sustain operations. She emphasized that the reserve fund is essential for balancing budgets and operational stability.
- **Annual External Audit** - Scheduled to start in September, and three members are needed for the Audit committee, including long-standing participant Joey Epstein.
- **Performance Bond** - Requirements remain challenging due to prior deficits, but with recent funding support, the deficit has improved to \$85,000, and interim financials will be submitted to attempt securing the bond.
- **Vacation Policy Changes** – Changes are planned to reduce the liability from staff rolling over unused hours. The current 120-hour rollover will be replaced in June 2026 with a new policy of rolling over 80-hours, which is expected to improve finances by \$290,000.

- **KPMG Funding Model** – Discussion was held on the KPMG child welfare funding model being developed by DCF and mandated by the legislature for the third consecutive year. While the model builds on prior efforts, it raises concerns because it uses a per-member, per-month approach similar to managed healthcare, which could unintentionally penalize agencies like ChildNet that reduce the number of children in care, as funding decreases with lower caseloads. Additionally, the model relies on historical expenditures, which favors previously well-funded agencies and may underfund historically under-resourced areas like Palm Beach. The prior iteration also used a blended rate that did not account for differing costs per child age or service type, but DCF has expressed willingness to discuss adjustments. ChildNet is optimistic, due to the involvement of Ms. Eprifania as a lead agency liaison, and ongoing discussions with DCF leadership aim to refine the model while ensuring fair and adequate funding for all agencies.
- **Reserve Fund** – Larry Rein highlighted the importance of the reserve fund, noting that the concept was originally proposed by board member Michael Lepera. The reserve fund, now overseen by Donna Eprifania, has provided crucial financial stability, achieving its strategic goal of 1% of the total contract and helping safeguard ChildNet's finances.

- **Audit Committee** – Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, confirmed membership for the Audit committee, which now includes Nancy Stamper, Committee Chair, Michael DiBrizzi, and Victoria Thurston, with Joey Epstein continuing as an external participant, ensuring the committee is fully staffed.

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

- **Quarterly Strategic Plan Update – Quarter 2** - Discussion was held on the 2nd quarter of the 3rd year of the Strategic Plan for 2023 to 2025, a copy of which was provided to the Board members.

- **Goal 1 – Improve and sustain ChildNet's workforce by implementing proven and innovative practices.** *Evidence of goal progress in Year Three: ChildNet will reduce annual external voluntary turnover to 18%.*

Neiko Shea highlighted progress on Goal 1, achieving a quarterly external voluntary turnover rate of 17.18%, below the 18% target. Retention strategies include onboarding videos, supervisor focus groups, and detailed exit interview tracking. Turnover reasons have shifted from pay and supervisor issues in 2024 to personal/family matters and growth opportunities in 2025, reflecting improvements in supervisor relations. Active employee engagement initiatives further support workforce stability and retention.

- **Goal 2 – Expand the array of appropriate placement and treatment options for children.** *Evidence of goal progress in Year Three: ChildNet will reduce the percentage of children with stays over 14 days at SafePlace to 25%.*

Neiko Shea reported that while Palm Beach met the SafePlace target at 22.67%, Broward exceeded it at 30%, resulting in an overall rate of 26.83%. Key efforts include monitoring children entering care for service needs, improving coordination through committees and training for dependency judges, opening a 4-bed foster home for teens with complex needs, enhancing foster home recruitment and retention, expanding BQRTP program capacity, and piloting Level 1 licensing to increase placements with relative caregivers.

- **Goal 3 – Improve identification and support of kinship caregivers.** *Evidence of goal progress in Year Three: ChildNet will increase the percentage of children in kinship placements to 62%.*

Julie DeMar reported that placement rates are 52.43% in Palm Beach, 49.17% in Broward, and 50.62% overall, short of the 62% target. Strategies include oversight meetings with DCF, collaboration with family finding teams and providers, kinship quality reviews, and Kinship Strategic Workgroup updates. Most initial actions are complete, with a new focus on supporting

teenage placements. Efforts also emphasize family-like placements over group care, and Broward plans to launch kinship support contracts in fall 2025, providing relatives with financial, behavioral, and tangible resources, alongside Level 1 licensing initiatives.

Kinship Care: A Deeper Dive: Larry Rein provided an in-depth discussion on Goal 3 above regarding kinship placements. While overall progress seemed modest, data analysis revealed strong performance for younger children: in Broward, 62% of children birth-5 and 64% of children 6-12 were placed in kinship care, while placements for teenagers remain low at 28%. In Palm Beach, younger children consistently reached 60%, with similar gains for ages 6-12, but teenage placements lag. Comparisons with other Florida lead agencies showed Palm Beach ranked third and Broward sixth in relative caregiver placements. National data indicate Florida (41%) exceeds the U.S. average (32%), suggesting the statewide goal of 60% may have been unrealistic. Mr. Rein emphasized focusing future efforts on supporting relatives caring for teenagers, contextualizing current performance as strong, and considering adjustments to strategic goal metrics while linking agency-wide evaluations to progress on these objectives.

- **FY 2024-2025 Board Survey Presentation** - Larry Rein reported on the results of annual board survey, which assesses engagement, involvement, and financial commitment. Overall, responses remained consistent with previous years, with most feedback categorized as “very good” or “satisfactory,” and a small number noting areas needing improvement, particularly around awareness of local and national trends. Comments highlighted the desire for more in-person engagement, involvement, and financial participation. Positive trends were noted in event attendance, networking, promoting ChildNet, personal giving, and introducing potential donors. While progress has been made in board engagement and financial contributions, the board collectively recognizes the need for continued improvement.
- **FY 2024-2025 CEO Scorecard/Evaluation** - Larry Rein reported that the CEO scorecard and evaluation are on schedule. We are awaiting final year-end performance reports from DCF, which are essential for assessing agency performance. Next month, the governance committee will receive the CEO’s self-evaluation and performance data, allowing them to complete the evaluation process.
- **Board Resignation of Chelsea Bellew – eff. 06-30-25** – Larry Rein reported the resignation of Chelsea Bellew, Palm Beach board member, who stepped down due to business and family commitments. Ms. Bellew provided a supportive letter and suggested one potential replacement, though we are seeking someone with broader community involvement and Mr. Rein will follow up with Ms. Bellew on this.
- **Membership Recruitment** - Larry Rein noted one of the vacancies in Palm Beach is in the process of being filled. We are just waiting for the final documents to come in for that applicant. Mr. Rein urged everyone to offer up suggestions for the one vacancy in Palm Beach that remains.

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

Alcolya St. Juste, CLO, reported on a pending lawsuit. Coverage counsel was engaged to assist in reaching a settlement, and the matter was successfully resolved with insurance support. Ms. St. Juste provided an update on the number of incidents reported, though the exact number was not available.

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

The committee met on August 13th and reviewed one policy update regarding the correction of allowed time off. The committee updated topics for future meetings, including fiscal year 24–25 census trends and the ChildNet Performance Review. Julie DeMar reported positive performance outcomes for both



Broward and Palm Beach, reflecting strong achievement of contract measures and accountability metrics.

▪ **Real Estate Committee – Donna Korn, Committee Chair**

There is no update as the committee did not meet in August.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin

- **Welcome New Board Directors** – Josefa Benjamin welcomed the two newest Board Directors – Karen Cabrera and Michael DiBrizzi, Provider Representative.
- **Board Survey Results** – Josefa Benjamin is excited about the board doing more in-person activities, not just meetings, but things that bring everyone together. ChildNet is planning a community project with Calvary Chapel in Fort Lauderdale, tentatively scheduled for November 1st. We will survey board members to pick the best dates for upcoming events so more people can join. Overall, the board is looking forward to more hands-on, face-to-face engagement.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **Statewide Issues** – Larry Rein reported that ChildNet remains an active member of the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC). Recently, two lead agencies, Hillsborough County and Central Florida, chose not to renew their membership, though it is expected they may return. Kurt Kelly, FCC's long-time CEO, announced his retirement after significant advocacy work, including securing crucial funding for ChildNet. Finding his successor will be challenging. Going forward, the FCC aims to refocus on promoting community-based care and leading legislative discussions, rather than mission creep into other areas. Mr. Rein emphasized the importance of finding the right leader to continue this work.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- September 26, 2026 @ 8:00 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:38 a.m.

Lois Marino

10/1/25

Lois Marino
Board Secretary

Date

(Corporate Seal)