

**THI/SCI TRUST FUND
ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
November 4, 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 10:02 a.m. on November 4, 2021.

IN ATTENDANCE

Board Members: Andrew Kuyoro, Sherlyn Sullivan, Stephanie Fletcher, Senator Franklin Foil, Gary Matherne, Dr. Michael Chafetz, Kenneth Alexander, Representative Lawrence A. "Larry" Bagley, Melissa Bayham, Robert Chatelain and Yvette Pacaccio

Board Members Not in Attendance: John Fanning

Agency Staff: Lora Bennett, Tonia Gedward, 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 May 13, 2021. Andrew asked if anyone had any comments about the minutes. Kenneth Alexander moved to accept the minutes. Sherlyn Sullivan seconded. The meeting minutes were approved as presented.

PROGRAM UPDATES / BUDGET-FINANCIAL REPORT – SHERLYN SULLIVAN

Sherlyn started with the THSCI Fund Protection Legislation. She stated the Board briefly talked about this issue during the last meeting but it wasn't on record because there was no quorum. She stated that the program has not collected enough funds to continue to effectively operate. This has been since COVID; the funding has been decreasing due to the municipalities not writing tickets and/or having court. She stated things are back to normal as far as the municipalities. We are still playing catch up on receiving the same amount of funding each month as we were getting prior to COVID. She went on to say that although the collections are down, the good news is that the expenditures have decreased as well. This is due to us not opening cases, current participants spending their funds or participants having moved out of state. She stated, however, our expenditures are decreasing at an equal or maybe a greater level than our collections going

up. She stated it looks like we are in good shape to start opening cases again. She informed the new board members we had to cut our THSCI contractors across the board until we can see the collections going back up and we feel comfortable again. Sherlyn stated that very soon we would increase the contractors back to their original amounts (if approved by LDH) so that they can begin opening the new cases.

Sherlyn reiterated that we still need help with funding. She informed the board that the only reason we were able to sustain the program right now is due to our Legislature and our LDH Administrative Program has allowed us to use some of the state's general funds. She stated the financial spreadsheet shows we will only collect \$1.2 million this year, which is very low, but because we have \$571,000 in state general funds, we are still able to continue services. She stated we hope the collections continue to increase. She went on to say the financial spreadsheet shows the collections increased in July, August, and September. She stated that is about \$102,000 per month, however, prior to COVID, we were collecting \$125,000 - \$130,000 per month at that point. She stated we were collecting \$1.5 - \$1.6 million per year. Mr. Kuyoro stated he spoke to Rep. Bagley via telephone on how to increase the rates/fees that the trust fund has now. He stated he would like to discuss the funding source. Mr. Kuyoro stated his intentions were for Rep. Bagley to discuss what we can do to stabilize the funding source. He went on to say there is an amendment in the next election that will allow the state to swipe any dedicated funds. He asked if this was something that will affect the trust fund in the future. He added we need to make sure we have a solid funding source for the program. He asked if the Representative to tell us as far as the Legislative is concerned, what could be done so that we do not have a low funding source in the future.

Sherlyn stated we have done a huge push to make sure the municipalities are sending us money. She stated we have not seen many municipalities not sending at all or not sending regularly. She said besides COVID, she thinks the problem is that the rates/fees have not changed since 1987. She stated that increasing the fines could help with increasing this fund. Tonia added, the program reviews the municipality report every three months to see who is not paying or if they miss a payment. She stated the program sends out letters requesting payment. The letter includes the LDH attorney's name and information. The letters seem to help. Mr. Alexander asked if the amount of money we are receiving is the amount due or is it the bare minimum. He asked if there is a way to track the payments. Tonia stated we do not have a way to track the amount for the payments. We do not look at their finances; we go by whatever they tell us. They have a report (self-reported information) that they complete with the payments when mailed to the department. On that report, they will put how many of each ticket they receive, which will automatically calculate the amount depending on the tickets issued. Rep. Bagley stated he talked to Tonia once about possible legislation to increase the tax on alcohol. He stated this is something we may be able to do on the backend. He stated he needed to talk to Senator Foil to discuss other options. He stated he was on the committee to look at dedicated funds; however, he does not remember the funds changed from the trust. He stated he knows Jindal swept the funds a long time ago. He is not sure what the law is but he can go back and check to be sure to add things in to keep it from happening again. Rep. Bagley stated he does not know what the entire solution is but he is here at the board's disposal and certainly interested in wanting to fund and making sure, we have money to continue the program. Senator Foil stated he and Rep. Bagley definitely need to talk about these issues. He stated he thinks it will be tough to raise the court fees. He stated the

debate is should they continue to fund these programs off fees or make a change through the budget process. He stated he is not saying it is impossible but it is premature to go that way until it is flushed out.

Senator Foil stated, as far as raising taxes on alcohol or tobacco, this is something that could be looked at in a fiscal session. It will not be this session but the next session, but that is a long-term possible solution. He asked what the gap is and how much generated appropriate amount of dollars we would need every year to be able to accomplish the mission of the foundation. He stated it does not look like we need a big appropriation. Sherlyn stated it would be the state general fund at the top of the financial spreadsheet, which is \$571,832. She stated that is what the state has allowed us to use to bridge the gap. She stated we normally spend about \$2.3 million on the program. Right now, we are only spending \$1.2 million (correction \$1.8). She state we would love to have \$2.4 (correction \$1.8) million and to be able to open cases and provide services immediately. However, we are three years behind. Senator Foil suggested in the short-term is to look at the budget bill for the next session. He stated they're going to have surpluses from this year and next year. He stated this would be the opportunity to make the case to try to get an amendment to fund the bill to try to catch up on the past cases. He stated the bill will start on the House side, but he will be happy to help to try to get the money if it is not put in the bill initially. To get a dedication to the foundation at least for a year. He stated if we can get together and give a realistic number as to what is needed. He stated this is a good time if any to get state funding. Mr. Kuyoro asked Tonia to get with Rep. Bagley and Senator Foil to find out a good time to meet to further the discussion.

PROGRAM STATUS – TONIA GEDWARD

Since the last board meeting, the program closed seven cases that were previously eligible. Cases are generally closed due to the participant expending his/her funds or the participant passing away.

As of 11/3/21, there are 285 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. They will remain on the waitlist until additional funding is available.

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

She stated she would begin working on increasing the contracts in December, based on the increase in funding. Tonia added simultaneously, she would be working on the review and opening new applications in January.

Tonia informed the board that since the last board meeting, the program received 122 Participant Services Plans (PSP); issued 109 Purchase Authorizations; reviewed 91 annual assessment documents; released (authorized) 229 payments to vendors; reviewed 19 (approved and denied)

new applications and processed 49 Application and Caseload Change requests. She stated application and caseload change requests consist of the following: We received 6 requests to update participant information, 11 requests for new applications; we mailed the requested applications to the individuals. We received 16 requests to close participant cases, 1 request to transfer participant cases to another region, 13 to update the participant's Responsible Representative information and 2 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 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 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. The payment processing times have improved from months to weeks, and now we are processing payments within 2-5 business days with 3 days being the average processing days.

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

Tonia stated that we still need to fill one board member seat [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. She also informed the board that we have filled two board member seats with Robert H. Chatelain, a survivor of a Spinal Cord Injury, who was appointed by the Governor. Also, Yvette D. Pacaccio, a family member of a survivor of a Traumatic Head Injury. She was also appointed by the governor.

BIALA – KIMBERLY HILL

Kimberly stated their helpline has remained consistent receiving on average 33 calls per month. Their website continues to receive good traction with an average of 1,000 page views per month. In addition, the Outreach continues around the state via phone calls, emails, Zoom calls, social media, and newsletter, website, and email blasts. She stated in-person visits have not been allowed at hospitals yet but they are getting information out through other sources.

She stated throughout the last few months, they have had a heavy focus on distributing resource backpacks to acute and rehab hospitals around the state for newly injured individuals with brain and/or spinal cord injuries. Over 200 resource backpacks have been distributed. As they traveled to give the backpacks to case managers and rehab directors, they also provided them with folders containing information about their organization, resource center, a resource guide, their helpline and copies of the trust fund application. She added they are already receiving calls from

individuals who were given backpacks. They have been extremely grateful and thankful for the resources BIALA provided.

With Hurricane Ida approaching at the end of August, they shared valuable information on Emergency preparedness with those they serve. BIALA also provided 50 emergency preparedness backpacks to support group leaders and rehab directors around the state. Kimberly stated these backpacks were provided by United Spinal Association, and are specific to emergency preparedness. She stated the month of September was consumed with relief efforts for individuals who were impacted by Hurricane Ida. 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 they worked hard to share this opportunity with colleagues from around the state to share with others, support group leaders, and individuals in the impacted areas. She added, for some individuals who did not have power, they assisted in completing the application on their behalf. Applications are being reviewed and money is dispersed upon approval.

Kimberly informed the board that October was Domestic Violence Awareness month so they used this time to provide awareness and education about the correlation between domestic violence and traumatic brain injuries. They participated in Walk a Mile in Her Shoes to also raise awareness about domestic violence and brain injuries. BIALA connected with AMG Physical Rehabilitation Hospital and participated in a Trunk or Treat where they handed out information about their organization. Many of their clients attended where BIALA was able to connect them to valuable resources and share TH/SCI applications. They continue to work throughout the month to share resources on BIALA social media pages that are beneficial to those they serve. She stated their newsletter, which goes out the last day of the month, shares valuable and free resources including webinars, magazine subscriptions, educational materials/opportunities and more. By including this in their newsletter, it is also shared on BIALA social media platforms and website. They also provided two virtual support groups each month often with a Guest speaker as well as connected individuals to support groups nationwide.

She stated the new dates for BIALA conference are March 25-26, 2022 in Kenner, La.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

FUTURE MEETINGS

The next board meeting is scheduled for February 10, 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 January 1st.

ADJOURNMENT

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

We were not able to discuss dates for future meetings. Please see below for the proposed dates for 2022.

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