

**THI/SCI TRUST FUND  
ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES  
February 11, 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 10:20 a.m. on February 11, 2021.

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Board Members: Andrew Kuyoro, Sherlyn Sullivan, Stephanie Fletcher, Beth Arredondo, Gary Matherne, Senator Franklin Foil and Michael Chafetz

Board Members Not in Attendance: John Fanning, Representative Lawrence A. "Larry" Bagley, Thomas Loupe, Hazel Odom, Kenneth Alexander and Melissa Bayham

Agency Staff: Tonia Gedward, Lora Bennett, Valencia Roberts, Dr. Fernando Lopez, 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 November 12, 2020. Andrew asked if anyone had any comments about the minutes. Dr. Chafetz stated Beth Arredondo should be addressed as Dr. Arredondo in the meeting minutes. The meeting minutes were approved with this correction.

**PROPOSED THSCI FUND PROTECTION LEGISLATION**

Tonia spoke about the proposed THSCI Fund Protection Legislation. She stated that OAAS is requesting to amend the statute to protect the THSCI Fund. She explained the bill adds language to the Traumatic Head and Spinal Cord Injury (THSCI) Trust Fund statute that will preserve funds strictly for the Fund. The language prevents funds from being transferred to other sources. She stated individuals with head and spinal cord injuries will continue to have access to these funds provided the funds are not allocated to other sources. LDH will continue to serve as many people as possible with 100% of the funding collected each year.

Sherlyn stated the Bill did not make it to the Governor's packet. She stated unless someone authors the bill, this bill will not move forward in FY22. She stated we do not have an author for the bill at the moment. She was hoping to talk to Rep. Bagley about this in the meeting today. Senator Foil stated that one of the problems with this session is that it is a fiscal session where you only have five general Bills. He stated unfortunately he has more requests than Bills at this time. Senator Foil asked where the funding comes from for this fund. Sherlyn stated we have a funding problem right now (Due to lack of payment received from Municipalities). She explained the funding comes from additional fees that are imposed on DWI, reckless operations and speeding tickets. She stated as with everything else, during COVID, tickets are not being paid or written. Because of this, funding is down this year. She stated we were collecting between \$1.5 – \$1.6 million per year. Last year we only collected \$1.2 million and this year we are in line to collect \$1.2 million. She stated we are seeing \$25,000 per month less than we were seeing before COVID.

Sherlyn stated that she would like to see an additional bill authored that would increase the current fees imposed on these moving violations. She said the fees have been the same since 1983.

Mr. Kuyoro asked if there were any more questions. He asked to keep the Board posted once we have spoken to the Representatives. Also to let the Board know if there is anything they can do to help.

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

Sherlyn asked everyone to review the financial report. She stated the major take away is that we do not have enough money to run this program. She stated the program is struggling, if we did not have carryover money from last year, we would not have money right now to run the program. She explained that we are projected to collect \$1.2 million in the revenue section of the Financial Report. She stated the total projected expenditures are \$2.1 million. She explained we are projected to spend \$2 million but will only collect \$1.2 million. She said, "Luckily we have the \$600,000 in carry over but that is still not enough to get us where we need to be." She stated the hope is after talking to the fiscal department, that we will be able to find some state general funds to supplement the program for at least this year. However, she stated that the future of the program is uncertain and we have some tough decisions to make. She stated in orange at the bottom of the report, that our current fund balance at the end of January was only \$52,000. She stated that every month we are spending more than we are collecting, and that is a problem. She asked if anyone had any questions. There were no additional comments.

Tonia added we made a few phone calls to some of the municipalities to find out exactly why their collections have decreased. She stated that they all pretty much gave the same answer, which is due to COVID, they are not having court. They are not giving as many (traffic) tickets, which means that they are not collecting as much money. She stated she did not know what we could do. Mr. Kuyoro stated that we need to make adjustments. He stated COVID has affected a lot of things as far as financial matters. He said we don't know how we will balance things next year, so we may need to make an adjustment to the number of people being served. He suggested to maybe review the program participants to see exactly who we have and where they stand to

make adjustments for them. He stated we hate to do this but we don't want to have the participants anticipating services that we can't provide. He stated we should start making adjustments for the worst case scenario. We do not want to wait for the money to run out. Sherlyn stated we have already went through the program to see if there is anyone we can take off the program. She stated that is all we have done because we cannot just kick eligible participants off of the program. She stated for a long time we were pushing to open every case so we can eliminate the waitlist; however, we have had to stop opening cases. She stated we cannot open any cases until we know we have some additional funding. As of now, the waitlist is steadily increasing. Tonia asked if there were any more questions about the financial report. Dr. Arredondo asked were there any other financial relief opportunities related to COVID that this fund would qualify for. Sherlyn stated she is dealing with the federal funds on so many different levels. However, she has seen anything that relates to this program. She stated we cannot receive donations. Sherlyn stated the only thing we can do is talk about how to reduce expenditures. She stated reducing expenditures will help a little while but it won't help long term. She stated we need more funds. Tonia stated she has looked for federal grants but she did not see anything. Dr. Chafetz asked if the state collects money on a tax for alcohol. Sherlyn stated she is more than sure they do. He stated alcohol contributing to brain injuries may be another revenue source for legitimate reasons. Sherlyn agreed and stated it was something to check into but she wasn't sure who to check with. She asked Senator Foil if he had anyone that could look into it. He stated if she sends him an email he will have his legislative assistant look into it. He stated the question is "Can we use taxes collected on alcohol to fund the program?" Sherlyn responded yes and can we be added to the list of things the alcohol tax pays for.

## **PROGRAM STATUS – TONIA GEDWARD**

Tonia started by informing the Board that the THSCI Trust Fund Program Monitor, unexpectedly passed away. She stated that the staff member started with the program in March of 2020. Her positive attitude and bubbly personality quickly made a huge mark in our program and we will miss her dearly. She stated the hardest task will be trying to replace someone who is irreplaceable.

She stated currently the Trust Fund is serving 561 participants. The program closed 60 cases that were previously eligible.

As of 11/12/20, there are 238 applicants on the waitlist. Tonia stated, "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."

Tonia stated she developed systems, called trackers, in SharePoint that track task items received via email or mail. Task items may include matters such as participant requests for goods and services, payments, requests to close or reopen a participant's case, etc. These trackers not only allow her to track how many request we receive each month, but they also are designed to help all staff keep up with outstanding task. The trackers send alerts and reminder to staff members when a task needs their attention. It also allows her, as the manager, to determine the status of a

particular task without having to search through previous emails or email a staff member for updates.

Since the last board meeting, the program received 96 Participant Services Plans (PSP); 90 annual assessment documents; released 273 payments to vendors; reviewed 18 applications and processed over 70 closure and transfer requests.

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 of our internal processes. We continue to update policy and procedures to better serve program participants."

She stated, "At the start of the pandemic, several of the municipalities were not submitting payments as required by law. In September, the program sent over 80 letters to non-payers. Since the last board meeting, we have seen a slight decrease in collections. We've called a few of the municipalities and they indicated the reduction is due to the pandemic. Several municipalities indicated that court dates have been postpone due to the pandemic."

Tonia informed the board that there are two board member seats that they may want to look at replacing. Neither of the two board members in theses seats have attended more than one meeting since she has been the Program Manager. She stated she understands that things come up and members may occasionally miss a meeting. However, it is very difficult to ensure that the board has a quorum each quarter when there are members who never attend meetings. Therefore, she is requesting assistance from the board.

She went on to explain, the first seat is the Survivor of a Spinal Cord Injury, 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 meeting 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, 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 who is willing to fill the seat. Tonia 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 we are able to find someone else.

## **BIALA – KIMBERLY HILL**

Kimberly stated despite the continued challenging times, our mission has not waived, and our resource center (via phone and online) has remained open and active. We are happy to share that we provided and continue to provide many pertinent resources to individuals with brain and/or spinal injuries, caregivers, and professionals around the state.

She stated most hospitals are still not allowing in-services so she has continued sharing information about the trust fund program and application with case managers and therapy directors around the state. However, one in-service was allowed in person in Lake Charles. Additional in-services are now being scheduled via Zoom. Over the past two months, there has been an increase in application requests.

She stated their helpline has remained consistent receiving on average 28 calls per month. The website continues to receive good traction with an average of 1,000-page views per month. Outreach continues around the state via phone calls, emails, Zoom calls, social media, newsletters, website, and email blasts.

She also stated the virtual support group meetings for individuals with spinal cord injuries and brain injuries have continued where we have provided guest speakers on our Zoom calls and/or support and social opportunities. In February, we began offering a monthly virtual exercise group lead by a physical therapist and one of our board members. The exercises are modified if needed and can be done standing and/or from a seated position. We hope to continue to offer these classes monthly.

She explained because so many individuals are reaching out to us; feeling alone and isolated, they have been connecting brain and spinal cord injury survivors and caregivers from around the state to virtual groups being offered around the country. Through our two national organizations, we are aware of many national virtual events/groups so we have been sharing these opportunities to anyone who is interested.

She stated to promote the trust fund in other ways, they are finalizing a short video about the program and will be sharing it in their monthly newsletter, on their social media platforms, and our website. Prior to sharing the video, it will be approved by the TH/SCI program manager. They are also hoping to join forces for an advocacy day at the state capitol in May with The Arc, People First, and a few other organizations.

She stated they are also working with a rehab hospital to improve the peer mentor program. In March, BIALA will be offering a peer mentor training to new mentors and a refresher to current mentors. Additionally, they are partnering with likeminded organizations to increase state advocacy efforts.

While challenges are still being presented, they look at them as opportunities. Throughout 2021, BIALA will continue to find new ways to provide resources and support to those they serve.

They will continue their mission to be the statewide resource for people impacted by brain and/or spinal cord injury.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

None

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next board meeting is scheduled for May 13, 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 before May 1<sup>st</sup>.

2021 THSCI Advisory Board Meetings:

Thursday, August 12, 2021

Thursday, November 4, 2021

**ADJOURNMENT**

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