

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council  
Executive Committee Meeting  
October 18, 2023

CHRISTI GONZALES: Good morning, everyone. The quarterly meeting of the executive committee for the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council will now come to order. I would like to welcome everyone to this meeting. And we're going to go ahead and start. Will Ebony Haven please call the roll for attendance.

EBONY HAVEN: Yes, ma'am. Ms. Jill Hano.

JILL HANO: Present.

EBONY HAVEN: Ms. Angela Harmon.

ANGELA HARMON: Present.

EBONY HAVEN: Ms. Christi Gonzales.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Present.

EBONY HAVEN: Ms. Brooke Stewart.

BROOKE STEWART: Present.

EBONY HAVEN: And Ms. Renoda Washington.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Present.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Thank y'all for coming. At this time we will have Ms. Ebony Haven read the mission statement and ground rules.

EBONY HAVEN: The Louisiana Developmental Disability Council's mission is to increase independence, self-determination, productivity, integration and inclusion for Louisianians with developmental disabilities by engaging in advocacy, capacity building and systems change.

Our ground rules are members must be recognized by the chair before speaking. Be respectful of each other's opinion. Break for ten minutes every one and a half hours. Discuss council business in a responsible manner. Except as necessary restrict the use of electronic communication, i.e. texting during council and committee meetings. Silence or turn off all cell phones. The mission statement is posted at every meeting. Be on time for meetings. No alphabets. And side conversations are kept to a minimum, done quietly and restricted to the subject at hand.

CHRISTI GONZALES: All right. The next item of business is the approval of the meeting summary for the August 28 executive committee meeting which was

distributed. The meeting summary will not be read unless requested by a member. Are there any corrections? If there is no objection the meeting summary is approved as distributed. And the meeting summary is approved.

The next item of business is the update on the building advocacy capacity contract. The chairman recognizes Ms. Ebony Haven.

EBONY HAVEN: Okay. So the contract proposal that we received, or that the council approved at the July 2023 meeting for the building advocacy capacity and educational employment was awarded to the Arc of Louisiana. But at that meeting the council made a stipulation that the Arc had to work with Bayou Land Families Helping Families and collaborate with them on that particular contract. However, the work that Bayou Land was going to do was focus groups with special education directors, community organizers that are involved with employment. They were going to do focus groups with parents and family members. However, whenever the executive director of Bayou Land reached out he sent out a mass email to SPED directors, like I said, community organizers who are involved in employment he didn't get any response or participation in those focus groups. So he felt like he really couldn't contribute to that contract, so he decided to just pull out. So I just wanted to let the council know. Let you guys know that he will not be a part of the contract. So I talked to Nicole. There's no need to make any motions or anything because the contractor that you guys awarded the contract to will carry out the contract according to the proposal that they submitted to you guys in July. Any questions?

JILL HANO: Talked to who?

EBONY HAVEN: I talked to Nicole Learson because I wanted to make sure you guys didn't have to go back and make another motion, Jill, to take Bayou Land out of that particular contract. But she said it's not due to any fault of the council. It's just he couldn't carry out his portion of the contract and he decided to just pullout himself so there was no need for another motion.

JILL HANO: Okay.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Thank you, Ebony. The next item is the executive director hiring process.

EBONY HAVEN: It's open for y'all to discuss. At this point you guys would discuss the process you would like to use to hire a new executive director. And once you decide

on a process and make a motion that motion will go to the full council for a vote.

CHRISTI GONZALES: What have y'all used in the past that has worked, not worked?

EBONY HAVEN: So the last search that the council did-- oh, Jill, do you want to answer that question?

JILL HANO: Ebony can answer, but I have many thoughts on this. Because I believe that Ebony's going to explain what we did to hire the last executive director, but I believe, I could be wrong, but I'm the only person here that was there when we hired the last executive director. And I want to take that process and do the complete and utter opposite.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Okay.

JILL HANO: Ebony, I'm sorry to interrupt.

EBONY HAVEN: No. That's fine. I mean, they need the historical knowledge, Jill. So I wasn't here when the previous, well, the initial director got hired so I don't know what that process was. When she retired the council decided to develop an executive director search committee and members were appointed, council members were appointed to that committee. And Brenton, you can help me out because he was the staff person over the committee. But I can tell you the process was very long. They took a while to come up with the job description. They actually hired a firm to help them do a nationwide search. But the process took almost two and a half years because we started in 2019 and the previous director didn't start until May 2021. So it took a long time for the process. But they conducted interviews with the candidates after they did their nationwide search and got applicants and then they narrowed it down and the full council conducted interviews with I want to say three candidates, yes.

JILL HANO: So it was recommended to me-- oh, Christi, can I talk?

CHRISTI GONZALES: Yes, you have the floor.

JILL HANO: Sorry.

CHRISTI GONZALES: That's okay.

JILL HANO: It was recommended to me by a former council member that we hire a search firm, but I don't-- did I say former chair or director?.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Council member.

JILL HANO: That we hire a search firm. But I've had some conversations with staff and Christi and other

contacts I have and I highly, highly, highly suggest not a search firm. And if I-- I always play the if (inaudible)-- I don't know how this goes, but if it were up to me I would definitely consider promoting from within. And like I said during (inaudible) an executive director Friday. So I think the, I mean, another friend that was on the search-- never mind. And it just was a lot and was so much and I thank God every day I was not on that search committee. And so I would like-- Nicole, can I make a motion?

NICOLE LEARSON: Absolutely.

JILL HANO: I would like to motion right now if we could think about hiring from within as opposed to a search. It was nationwide or statewide, Eb?

EBONY HAVEN: It was a nationwide search.

JILL HANO: And you may or may not lose council members and council staff over a big to-do production. So my motion is to get your executive director candidate from within the current staff.

EBONY HAVEN: I'm working on pulling it up, guys. Hold on one second.

JILL HANO: I have a question because if we weighed out the break we took during Covid, like how long was the process?

BRENTON ANDRUS: There was a small break during Covid, but I don't remember the exact timeframe. Some of the barriers that we had, there was a lot of factors at play, a lot of people that were involved in the search. So we had, it wasn't the executive committee that was the search committee. It was part of executive committee. It was part council members. Somehow there were non-council members that also ended up on the committee. And then we got a memo from the feds that that was not the case. They could not be on the actual committee. It had to strictly be council members. And so that was a disruption.

When you have a lot of people at play you have to have a quorum. So part of the problem we had was we had so many people we had a large quorum and we had to meet often. I think we didn't meet often enough which is part of why it took a long time because when you hire a search firm, so just for your knowledge, our search firm quoted us, if I'm not mistaken, and this is 2019 numbers, I don't know what they would be now, was anywhere between 20 to 50,000. We went with the lower option, and I can tell you that at least

the last time I checked, and in 2019 when we did this they said we were pretty much their last kind of client, if you will. They were not going to be doing these sort of things anymore. We contracted with them and then they subcontracted the work out to someone else to help us with this process. Who was great, but I don't know what that person charges. But part of what I think you have to consider if you do go in like a search firm route would be cost. Would also be the commitment that it would have to be a whoever you appoint as the search committee. Or if you do it yourself as the executive committee. You would have to be willing to meet pretty often because this search firm is not just going to do the work and bring somebody back to you. You are going to want to be involved and they are going to ask you to be involved in development of the search. The questions for the interview. Reviewing of the applicants. Like all this kind of stuff. So that's going to be things that you'll need to consider.

But all of that is what takes a lot of time. And then you have applicants that you interview. You have to coordinate their schedules along with all these schedules to also have a quorum because this is all public meetings. Even an interview is a public meeting until it goes into executive session. And then you bring this person out before the full council, and it's not included in your typical council meeting. You have to have a separate meeting. So that's what took so long. Especially-- and that was we were able to do those things virtually. Right now we still don't have guidance on the new laws that have been passed as far as how that's going to impact us. So until that rule is there these things are going to have to happen in person.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Jill, just a clarification. For the motion, you're recommending that we just open it from within?

JILL HANO: Yes, ma'am.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there a second?

BROOKE STEWART: I second it.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there any debate? It's moved and seconded to go ahead and hire from within for executive director. Is there any debate from committee members? Is there any public comment? Are y'all ready for the question? The question is on whether to hire an executive director from within the current staff instead of

conducting a nationwide search. Made by Jill Hano and seconded by Brooke Stewart. Are there any objections to this motion? Okay. Hearing no objections. Are there any--.

EBONY HAVEN: I have a comment. So if we pass the motion you guys will still have to come up with a process for interviewing. So if we pass it as is the current staff, whoever is interested would, I guess, apply. But you guys would still have to come up with the process. Like is the executive committee going to be the ones responsible for interviewing and negotiating. Or are y'all going to give that power to the full-- I mean, not the power. Are you going to allow the full council. So there needs to be a little bit more discussion specifically on what that process looks like.

JILL HANO: So I'm sorry.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Go ahead, Jill.

JILL HANO: No. You were first.

BROOKE STEWART: Okay. My question was can we make a motion to just promote within? Like when you just made the motion.

CHRISTI GONZALES: To promote instead of hiring from within?

BRENTON ANDRUS: Like an appointment.

CHRISTI GONZALES: That way we wouldn't have to go through the interview process.

BROOKE STEWART: Is that possible?

SPEAKER: Is it possible just to appoint who's in place now?

JILL HANO: People are going to be mad, y'all.

CHRISTI GONZALES: The recommendation that we bring to the council is that we will appoint from within, but the final say is from the whole council. Is that what we want to do?

JILL HANO: Nicole Learson, can I withdraw my motion and Brooke make a new motion?

NICOLE LEARSON: At this time yes, you can with the permission, so with the permission of the chair you can ask to withdraw your motion. And if there's no objection you can do that.

JILL HANO: Okay. So Christi, may I please, with sugar, can I withdraw my motion?

CHRISTI GONZALES: Yes, you may. Are there any objections to withdrawing?

SPEAKER: I have a question. Why do you want to withdraw that motion?

CHRISTI GONZALES: I think it's because if we do the current staff we'd have to come up with the interviews.

EBONY HAVEN: I can just provide clarification. So if we pass the motion as is you guys will have to come up with another process and like specifics on interviewing and all that's included in the hiring process. What Brooke is suggesting to the committee is that y'all don't-- you want to explain. I don't want to put words in your mouth.

BROOKE STEWART: Just appoint Ebony as the director and skip, forgo the hiring process, extra meetings and commitment from us and...

SPEAKER: So will we be going back to Jill's motion?

EBONY HAVEN: She would withdraw her motion. It would be like it wasn't going to take place.

JILL HANO: I have to withdraw that motion. And then does that need a second?

SPEAKER: What are you saying, Ebony? Even if we present that to the council we still need to have something else in place. Like for instance--.

EBONY HAVEN: If she withdraws this motion and you guys accept Brooke's motion and it's passed, that will go to the full council for a vote.

SPEAKER: What if they do not agree?

EBONY HAVEN: Y'all will go back to discussion and the council will have to come up with--.

SPEAKER: We need to be thinking of something just in case.

BRENTON ANDRUS: If you pass the motion it will go to the full council and say they don't like it, they didn't have the opportunity on the floor to come up with what they think it should be. Let's say they also vote for this new motion, and you go through the negotiations, and they fall through, and it doesn't work out, then you'll have to reconvene.

SPEAKER: Okay. That's what I wanted to know.

JILL HANO: Are we still voting on the motion that passed or this is what we as a committee is passing? Like all this, like every motion we pass once we bring to the committee like nothing is guaranteed. Like every motion we pass could like not pass and the full council.

SPEAKER: I'm just trying to be proactive.

BROOKE STEWART: I would pass a motion--.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Let's do the withdraw first. If it's okay, Brooke.

BROOKE STEWART: I'm not doing the motion. That was part of my sentence. I'm just saying like I want to just pass a motion that we think our full council would accept.

JILL HANO: There's no way. I'm telling you.

BROOKE STEWART: That's what I'm saying. Like Jill brought that up. I don't want to make that motion of like something-- I don't want it to be like a great contention, I guess. If we have something else that we can...

JILL HANO: I do like-- so you don't want me to withdraw that? Because I like what you said better than what I said.

SPEAKER: And we all agree with what you said.

SPEAKER: But for our full council.

SPEAKER: We just have to be proactive in thinking of--.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Point of order. Jill, let's go ahead and do the withdraw. Are there any objections to her motion to withdraw her motion? No objections. The motion is withdrawn. Any other motions?

SPEAKER: Yes.

BROOKE STEWART: My motion is to promote the current--.

BRENTON ANDRUS: I didn't want to say it initially because I know y'all had to deal with the withdraw. To kind of speak to what you were saying you want to pass a motion that the council would agree with. I understand that but you have to remember your role as part of the executive committee is you are the executive committee so it's your job to come up with these things. You have in the back of your mind what the council is probably thinking or doing, but you have to stand behind the decisions that you make. So you want to make a decision that you're comfortable with. Something that you can really back up and something that it doesn't matter if you think your peers are going to agree or disagree. That's how this process works. They've elected you to be a chair of a committee or be on this executive committee and so that's a trust that they're putting in you to handle business and to bring to them. You're doing the heavy lifting for them in certain situations like today. And so you have to make something based on what you think is the best interest of the council. And if they disagree, they disagree. That's what tomorrow's about. They can disagree and come up with new ideas. This gets it started. You want to do what you think is best in here to bring to them and then let the cards



fall as they do.

CHRISTI GONZALES: So is there any other motions on the floor?

BRENTON ANDRUS: You may want to consider details of your appointment. So you're going to have to pay this person. You need to consider what you think that's going. Like you want to-- otherwise this is going to involve everybody coming back to start coming up with details.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Do we have details in what is the salary? Like we don't have any of that information. Can we get that so we can put that out on the motion?

EBONY HAVEN: All of that information is on Boards and Commissions.

JILL HANO: I can tell you that our past executive director was not only in the low end, like the range set by the committee was below because the top of the rank was still below the rank that we should be offering. And I may not have (inaudible) the last executive director and was like my bad.

CHRISTI GONZALES: So once we make the motion all the information will be distributed to us, and we can go from there.

EBONY HAVEN: Yes. I can definitely provide that information.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Brooke, did you want to make a motion?

BROOKE STEWART: Yes. But I wanted to say like I had looked up the salaries prior. I had thought that 115 like to 120 when I looked at the executive director salary.

JILL HANO: Where did you get that?

BROOKE STEWART: I looked at the Louisiana board and I just was looking at all like--.

CHRISTI GONZALES: (Inaudible).

EBONY HAVEN: So I guess can I hear the motion? Can I hear what you're proposing? You don't have to do the motion but.

BROOKE STEWART: I am looking to propose that we promote the interim director as the permanent executive director with a salary of 115 to 120,000. Or how does that?

BRENTON ANDRUS: You can set the salary. I don't know if I should be recommending-- I think it would be better if you had two motions where you had the person and then you have the salary so that way you can handle if they're in agreement with the person. I will say when you get to

the salary part there's a lot of factors you need to consider that maybe is not in the back of y'all's minds.

BROOKE STEWART: Okay. So moving forward with making the original. I would like to make a motion to hire interim director Ebony Haven as the permanent executive director for the council.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Do we have a second?

RENODA WASHINGTON: I second.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Second by Ms. Renonda. Is there any debate from committee members? So the motion is to hire from within the interim executive director Ebony Haven as the executive director of the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council which was made by Ms. Brooke Stewart and seconded by Ms. Renoda Washington. Is there any debate from committee members? None. Okay. Is there any public comment? Are you ready for the question? And so the question is to hire the interim executive director Ms. Ebony Haven as executive director of Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council. Are there any objections to this motion? All right. Are there any abstentions? None. Hearing no objection, the motion is approved.

JILL HANO: So if this is something you would want, Ebony?

EBONY HAVEN: I'm very interested.

JILL HANO: Okay.

CHRISTI GONZALES: I just want to suggest that we wait to do salary that way we have all the information and financials, if that's okay with the board.

SPEAKER: Yes.

CHRISTI GONZALES: We have all the information and once we have all that we can decide on salary. Is that okay?

SPEAKER: So you're still saying we need more to present on tomorrow?

EBONY HAVEN: I think this is a great motion. Since you guys want the additional information on the salaries we can provide that information. And remember there's always the full council tomorrow. You guys can make those motions on the floor at the full council about negotiating on whether that's going to be with the full council, or with the executive committee, or with Christi and Jill, the chair and the vice chair. Whatever the will of the council.

JILL HANO: I'm sorry.

CHRISTI GONZALES: You have the floor, Jill.

JILL HANO: I would feel more comfortable if we just, I mean, just had a number to put up there and then by tomorrow we will have more information. But I don't feel comfortable hey, Ebony start a new job. Well, how much. We don't know. So I would want to put a number there just to have it on record and then once we did our research. Maybe does that make sense?

SPEAKER: It makes sense to me.

JILL HANO: Okay. A dollar.

EBONY HAVEN: You're going to have to negotiate higher than a dollar, Jill.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Ebony and Brenton, do we have to go to executive session to discuss salary?

EBONY HAVEN: Whatever the will of the committee is. So it's a public position. The executive director of the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council is a public position. So that is one of the things like the salary is public information. So you don't have to go in executive session, but if you all feel more comfortable discussing the salary in executive session you can.

SPEAKER: So we step out?

EBONY HAVEN: We would need a motion to go into executive session.

JILL HANO: So I would like to make a motion to go into executive session to discuss salary.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there a second?

SPEAKER: Second.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Okay. Are there any objections to the motion? Are there any abstentions? Hearing no objections, the motion is approved. We'll go into executive session.

{Executive session}

CHRISTI GONZALES: Meeting has come to order now. The executive session is finished, completed. And our decision in executive session is to put executive director salary to be 160,000. Our next item is the 2024 legislative.

EBONY HAVEN: You have to make a motion. They need to make a motion to present to the full council.

SPEAKER: I would like to make a motion to set the executive director salary at 160,000 and present that to

the full board.

CHRISTI GONZALES: A second?

SPEAKER: I second.

CHRISTI GONZALES: It is moved and seconded to bring the salary for the executive director to 160,000. Is there any debate from the committee members? Is there any public comment? Are you ready for the question? So the question is to set the executive director salary at 160,000. Are there any objections to this motion? Are there any abstentions? Hearing no objections, the motion is approved.

Our next item is the 2024 legislative advocacy agenda recommendations. The chair recognizes Ebony Haven to start the discussion.

EBONY HAVEN: I know we are right at 10:00 so I know the next meeting is going to start in 15 minutes, so I'll be really brief. The information that you got in your packet includes the three items that the FHF directors and LaCAN leaders decided to recommend to the council for the 2024 legislative advocacy agenda. And those items included recurring funding for the Families Helping Families centers. Funding increase for direct service worker pay raises. And to eliminate the family flexible funding wait list.

So just to kind of give you guys a quick background on how we get to this part of it. The LaCAN leaders conduct regional LaCAN member meetings in their regions. Most of them at least did two. One in virtual. One in person. They collect the information from their members and then they send it all in to us. We categorize it and then we send it back out to the leaders and directors for them to actually rank them and prioritize them. And then at the kickoff meeting we discuss the ones that had a priority or a ranking of five or more. So that first document that was attached to the agenda, as you can see those are the items that receive that five or more priority rating. And then at the meeting they actually voted, and you can see on that second sheet.

SPEAKER: A total of five or more in priority one and two.

EBONY HAVEN: Right. Yeah. If you look here at the issues where it has the priority, if it totaled a five or more in priority one or two it was listed on that first sheet.

SPEAKER: If one and two totaled more than five?

EBONY HAVEN: Yeah. Five or more.

JILL HANO: Never mind.

EBONY HAVEN: So at kickoff the leaders and directors they vote on those items that they felt were most important and you can see the votes, the ones that are in favor and not in favor. And this is the legislative advocacy agenda that they decided to recommend to you all. So at this point you guys can accept the recommendation, those three items. Or we also included the list of all the community input that they received from every person from every region. So if there was another item that you all felt that you wanted to recommend to the council instead of those three items, you have the ability to do that. Or you can change the advocacy agenda all together. So those are your three options.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there a motion? Just asking a question. Is this what they would be working on in the new year, the budgetary year, is that what this is?

EBONY HAVEN: For the 2024 legislative session, yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: What the council would work on.

CHRISTI GONZALES: And this is the information they received from parents? Okay.

JILL HANO: So the family flexible funding, they didn't get the five.

EBONY HAVEN: Yeah. That one has two stars by it, Jill. If you look at it and you go to the bottom of the sheet it tells you that this issue was included in the list of issues obtained from statewide community input meetings, but it was not originally included in the list of highest priority rated issues. The LaCAN leaders and FHF directors voted to consider this issue as a potential recommendation to the council during the kickoff meeting.

JILL HANO: Okay.

EBONY HAVEN: Does anybody else have any questions?

BROOKE STEWART: Just make a motion to accept the recommendation.

EBONY HAVEN: If that's the will.

BRENTON ANDRUS: You have 100 items to consider.

JILL HANO: We can't do all 100.

SPEAKER: So they're ranked, correct?

BRENTON ANDRUS: They are not necessarily ranked. They are somewhat within each area. But the very back document that list all those issues, those aren't

necessarily ranked.

CHRISTI GONZALES: The two pages here are the recommendations.

EBONY HAVEN: The ones in gray are what's being recommended.

BROOKE STEWART: I would like to make a motion to accept the recommendations presented to us.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Is there a second?

RENODA WASHINGTON: I second it.

CHRISTI GONZALES: It's been moved and seconded to accept the legislative advocacy agenda recommendations. Is there any debate from committee members? Is there any public comment? Are you ready for the question? The question is that we accept the 2024 legislative kickoff advocacy agenda recommendations. All those in favor.

EBONY HAVEN: I just want to make sure that I include the items.

CHRISTI GONZALES: The question is on to accept the legislative advocacy recommendations for the 2024 year. Are there any objections to this motion? Are there any abstentions? Hearing no objections, the motion is approved. Is there any public comment? Is there any further business? Hearing none, we will adjourn the meeting. Meeting is now adjourned.