

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council
Self-Determination and Community Inclusion
October 16th, 2024

ANGELA HARMON: Good afternoon, everyone. The time is 1:03 and I would like to call the meeting to order. Brenton, would you like to do the roll call?

BRENTON ANDRUS: Sure. Dr. Barovechio. I don't think she's with us. Mr. Bennett. Yep, he's here. Mr. Billings.

MIKE BILLINGS: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Crain.

CHERI CRAIN: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Hagan.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Hano.

JILL HANO: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Harmon.

ANGELA HARMON: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Cherie Aduli.

CHERIE ADULI: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Nguyen. Mr. Rocca.

TORY ROCCA: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Stewart.

BROOKE STEWART: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: And Ms. Womack.

LAUREN WOMACK: Here.

BRENTON ANDRUS: You have ten and a quorum.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you, Brenton. Before we get started I just want to remind you all of a few rules. For committee members and members of the public attending in person please raise your hand to speak and wait to be recognized by the chair before speaking. To help the meeting run smoothly please keep side conversations to a minimum and comments related to the topics that we are discussing. For those committee members who are attending virtually remember you must be on camera and have your first and last name showing to be counted towards our quorum. Please keep microphones muted unless called upon by the chair. Electronically raise your hand to request to speak and wait to be called upon by the chair. For attendees electronically raise your hands to request to speak.

Once recognized by the chair your microphone will be turned on. After speaking in the microphone you will be returned to mute. Also, the question and answer is only to be used for those needing an ADA accommodation to participate in the public meeting. The public comment will not be accepted via Q and A except for those individuals who request the accommodations.

As per order committee members in person and virtually will be allowed to speak first. Public members in person will then be called on followed by public participating virtually who have their hands raised. Comments in the Q and A will be addressed last. As with all hybrid meetings it can be difficult for those wanting to speak in person and virtually. Please be patient. All comments and questions from the public will be limited to two minutes so please keep that in mind. Also, comments about a person's character will not be allowed. Finally, members of the public will have an opportunity to provide public comment before each vote and during designated public comment periods. The chair may also use their discretion to determine if comments will be accepted outside of those times.

Everyone should have reviewed the July meeting summary which was attached in the agenda you received via email. There is also a copy in your committee packet.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Also on the screen.

ANGELA HARMON: Okay, I need a motion to adopt the July meeting summary.

LAUREN WOMACK: I motion to adopt it.

MIKE BILLINGS: Second.

ANGELA HARMON: Okay. That is Lauren Womack motions to accept the July meeting summary and Mr. Mike Billings is the second. Is there any discussion, any public comment?

Okay, based upon the updated public meeting law we will now do a roll call vote. Brenton, please call the roll.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Dr. Barovechio. Mr. Bennett.

BRIAN BENNETT: Aye.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Mr. Billings.

MIKE BILLINGS: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Crain.

CHERI CRAIN: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Hagan.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Hano.

JILL HANO: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Aduli.

CHERIE ADULI: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Mr. Rocca.

TORY ROCCA: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Ms. Stewart.

BROOKE STEWART: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: And Ms. Womack.

LAUREN WOMACK: Yes.

BRENTON ANDRUS: So you have nine yeas, zero nays.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you. The motion to accept the July summary has passed by a vote of nine yeas and zero nays. Noncontractual updates. First is an update on the noncontractual updates. We have now Ms. Julie Hagan who will share with us updates.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Sure. First, I would like to introduce you guys to Gary Williams. He is the assistant secretary for the Office of Aging and Adult Services. And so this is his first time to meet you guys at the committee meeting so just wanted to introduce him before giving my remarks.

So just a few updates. And I see that we have roadshows and reductions so I'll just start with my updates before we get into the reduction discussion. For our new opportunities waiver there was legislative action passed at the last session to increase the night rate up to be commensurate with the day rate that we have. That increase has been completed and is effective as of October 1st. So all the, any billing that's happened after that they can now, providers can now bill for that higher rate of 18.50. We are also updating our provider manuals. Previously it said that staff at night could sleep at night and so we are removing the statement now that says that staff are able to sleep commensurate with the rate. So those changes haven't come out yet, but we are in process of deleting the statement that the direct support professionals may sleep while providing night services.

You know, we continue to get questions around the

direct support workforce crisis. We've done a lot with Brian and Medicaid, OAAS. We are working on a federal technical assistance so that we can try to identify some strategies. We do know that the rate that you can pay does have an impact on being able to have qualified staff, but we also know from other states that it's more than just that. There are some states that are paying 25-dollars an hour to direct support professionals and well over, you know, a lot of times we say what they're paying at McDonalds and Burger King. In some of the northern states they still have trouble in finding folks to be in the direct support workforce. So I think we're using this technical assistance opportunity to work with other states, look at what are all of the opportunities that we might have to really address what we know is a crisis. We know that there are people needing services that are not getting them right now because there's not the direct support staff out there to provide that. So we are continuing to work on that.

As well as continuing to work with some of our community colleges looking at trying to identify are there maybe programs like a CNA program but not a CNA program where you're doing some additional training for direct support professionals. A lot of what they do in the community colleges now are more facility based. So it's like if you go work in a nursing home or you go work in an ICF but it's not necessarily geared to what you do for people who are living in the community. So we're having conversations with them about trying to look at can we build some curriculums and maybe some certification. Even if it's maybe just a week that you go to, but something that really arms people to be better equipped to become direct support workers. And so we're continuing to really work on that partnership with them.

We're also looking at some different value-based payment models. Really trying to look at retention of staff as well as some higher training. And there will be some opportunities for folks to get incentive payments if they are able to do some of those things. We will be publishing for public comment in the next couple of weeks the eight measures that we plan to have value-based payments on. We've done some focus groups

on that. But you can look for that to get published, should you wish, it will be open 30 days for public comments on those eight measures that we're proposing right now for value-based payments.

Another big initiative we have right now is doing rate studies. So we're doing rate studies with intermediate care facilities or ICFDDs as well as home and community-based waiver services. So on the ICF for the ICF side Myers and Stauffer are the folks who are going to do that rate study. And on the home and community-based waiver side it's Milliman that's going to do that rate study. Both of them have done similar activities in other states. And what we really want to look at is we talk a lot about cost reports and we are trying to make sure that all of our providers do submit their cost reports because that's sort of a starting point. But we also know that there's maybe other things that should be considered outside of a cost report. So they'll be doing research into other states, especially other southern states. What's their rates. Their methodology.

They will also be looking at the cost to provide care for the providers and is there differences geographically. So if you live in New Orleans verses if you live in Alexandria. So your urban and your rural. Does that make a difference. Some folks have said if you live in New Orleans the cost of your insurance, for example, is much higher than if you live somewhere else. And all of those things are things that are required for the providers to have to pay to be able to do business. So they'll look at are there differences there. Look at are there differences right now. It doesn't matter how complex your needs are, people just get the same rate. So do we need to look at the acuity of needs in terms of what the cost to provide that service is. We hear that we don't require the providers, for example, to have a nurse but if you need help with your medications you have to have a nurse consulting and training your direct support professionals. So there's a cost there where if you don't need help giving your medication you don't have. So we're trying to see what are all those factors that go into the rate study. And then ultimately they will give us their findings both on the ICF side and on

Milliman on the rate side.

We're about to publish this. I think it's like hot off the press today. We may have just sent it to you guys this morning. But Milliman for on the home and community-based services side is going to be doing, Monday October 28th at 2:30 they're going to be doing a presentation for anybody who's interested to join and listen in. And they're going to describe the process that they plan to follow through their rate study. They're also going to be sharing some opportunities. I think we're going to do five different focus groups that we'll hear from the public so we'll have an opportunity to hear from people receiving services and what's important to them to consider in the rate study and then we'll hear from large providers, small providers, advocacy groups. There's a few different folks that we want to make sure that we hear from.

And this rate study goes for Office of Aging and Adult Services waivers as well as the OCDD waivers. And so it's both of us. And that is being funded through the American Rescue Plan Act. So if you're more interested and want to hear more information I encourage you that will be coming out through DD Council today or tomorrow or Friday since we have a council meeting.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, we did get it today so likely Friday since we're in meetings today and tomorrow we can push that out for everyone.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Yeah. And then ultimately the real goal is that we can have-- so, you know, and I know we're going to talk about budget, but we have a lot of conversations a lot of times around rates for your in-home and your day program services. And, you know, what an appropriate wage might be for our direct support professionals. And so what we're really hoping is that with this rate study when we have it we'll have a really objective way of looking at what is the cost to provide those services that we can make it public and let people know what is the cost. And so then as we look at where might we need to set a wage floor or something for direct support workers then what does that mean for the budget in terms of the cost of living. With the new access rule that we talked about in here last time it will require states to look at

that rate every two years. So it's not like we'll do this and then it will go away. We're required every two years to reevaluate our rate methodology through that access rule. So it's not a one and done kind of thing.

LAUREN WOMACK: Is there any talk, or y'all haven't gotten to that point, the increase in cost of living every two years? Is that something that they take into account?

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Yeah, and I think that's why they want to make sure that we do this every two years so that you can consider those things. Now some states, and this may come out in the report, some states set a rate based on their rate methodology and then through legislation there's some mandated inflation area type increases. We don't have legislation around that right now, but this may be something, again, once we kind of have this more objective information it will really help inform us about where those things do or don't make sense. Should we build in inflation or we have to do it every two years. Does it make sense for us to do it that way. I think we'll know more. My hope is that we'll know more. And Milliman has done this in several different states and has proven positive-- the one I know of specifically is in Indiana and all of the stakeholders really say that they were very happy with the outcome of what happened from the rate study in Indiana.

LAUREN WOMACK: Did they give you a timeframe of how many years or we don't really know at this point?

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: We don't really know at this point. They have given us a time. They plan to have the study completed and to us by June. So we'll have that probably not during session. They're going to try. The problem is if you rush too much you're not getting a quality product and so we want to make sure while we have the funding to do this that we're really doing it the right way. The downside to that is it doesn't give that to us during session to be able to potentially advocate. But they have said that by June or sooner they will have the work complete and a report to us is the current time.

We talked about this, for those of you guys that

were in the Act 378 meeting, earlier we talked about incontinent supplies. We are aware of concerns that our community is discussing around incontinent supplies and the ability to get the higher quality disposable undergarments as opposed to the less costly. We are working to look at that where we have that Medicaid rate set and what we may or may not do about it. So I can get into more detail but I think a lot of you guys were already here for Act 378. So if you have questions about that happy to take it. But OCDD is working-- I don't have a solution yet, and I'm not saying that we have it fixed, but we are actively trying to see what we can do around that, the cap that's currently set. Not the per person cap, but the cap that's set on each individual brief to see if there's any wiggle room we might have there.

At the last meeting you guys asked me to continue to talk about the access rule. So I can share that we did a lot of our staff went, both OAAS, OCDD and Medicaid went to the home and community-based services conference in August where they talked about pretty much all things access rule. They didn't give us a whole lot of new information. They did share that they are continuing to work through that. And so I don't have a specific topic but what I'll do, which had come at the request of the committee, was when we're ready to get public input I'll make sure that I bring that topic, Angela, I'll make sure you guys are aware that we might want to really take time to dig into any specific topics. But I don't have a specific one right now that we're kind of ready or positioned to say we really need you guys to tell us how to do this yet. But I'll definitely keep that in mind.

And then the last thing I have, if it's okay I'll jump up to roadshows, but we do have a roadshow that we are currently doing across the state. We've now been to Monroe and Shreveport and New Orleans but the rest are coming up in the upcoming weeks. We will also have a virtual meeting that will have the same information. It will be recorded and it will be placed on our website for people who either aren't able to attend in person or at the time of the virtual show. You can also take and we'll close caption the recorded version of the virtual roadshow so should you need it

translated you're able to, those closed captions are able to be translated so that folks have access to that.

So I think that concludes. I'm happy to take any questions. And Brenton, I don't know if you wanted me to talk about budget reductions or you wanted to talk about that and I'll chime in. I know you had a list.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, there is a list in there of the potential reductions in fiscal year 26. So that would be the year that starts July 1. It really isn't a lot of information that I necessarily plan to share as much as we were just giving you the information. This was, if I recall, which hopefully you recall, we pushed out an alert in August because house appropriations was meeting on August 30th to kind of review LDH's budget for fiscal year 26 and what it would look like if we took 100 million dollars out of their budget. Which is 4, 450 I think when you factor in the federal funds that would come from that investment from the state. Because there is an anticipated fiscal cliff not just next year but in subsequent years as well, and that's tied to the .45 sales tax that is scheduled to roll off in 2025. And so if that would not be renewed, or if revenue is not found, or if something changes we will have a deficit that we will have to offset which means we would have to cut budgets. And so this is a list, in your packet is a list of the potential cuts kind of where LDH had identified hey, if you cut our budget by this much these are some of the things that we would have to reduce. Again, they have to look at optional services which are a lot of the services that impacts the DD community. So elimination of pediatric day healthcare centers, the PACE program, adult day healthcare waivers, repealing the rate increases. So we have advocated for rate increases in the past. Those would be rolled back. Including the night rate that Julie just talked about. That would have to be rolled back as well. We used to say like what year it was that the rate would be, I don't remember what it is because we're not--

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: We used to talk about the 2008 rates, but yeah.

BRENTON ANDRUS: I don't know if that's the correct

lingo anymore. But essentially all the work that not just the council but lots of advocates and provider groups and everyone that has advocated for these increased rates we're going to see that roll back. Looks like there's some staff possibilities that LDH would be dealing with eliminations there. There were increased reimbursement rates for ICFs that were passed as well. We already talked about the night service. There's a transportation per diem in OCDD waivers that would be eliminated. There was a rate increase last year or the year before for support coordination services. That would be rolled back. We have a reduction of our coordinated system of care. And so a lot of those directly impact our IDD population so we wanted to make you aware of what those potential cuts are.

If you did participate in our legislative advocacy ad hoc committee, which I can say at least on our Zoom there were not a lot of our council on there. Hopefully you went back and watched it on YouTube. This was a big discussion of that committee because that committee's purpose was to develop an advocacy agenda for this upcoming session which would be in the spring. They reviewed a lot of these reductions, talked about what those reductions would be. We were fortunate in that most of our agency reps that were on our council participated in that particular meeting to answer questions and talk about what those impacts were. And so having a plan to address these reductions is going to be part of the agenda that they're going to recommend to the full council tomorrow. So I would encourage you all to familiarize yourself with this document. If you did not you could also go back and watch the house appropriations committee presentation from August 30th. You can also go back and watch the legislative advocacy ad hoc committee. Actually, that last one I very much recommend you go back and watch if you have not because you will be voting on the decisions that they made tomorrow and the idea is not to prolong the conversation in the main meeting. That's why we started this new committee. So please do your due diligence and watch that committee. But that's about it. We just wanted to make you aware and if there are any questions I'll default to Julie.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: And I'll default to Brian.

LAUREN WOMACK: So just to be correct in my understanding, we may have to cut not just the night rate which we advocated for last time, but also subsequent increases that the council had advocated for in past years, correct?

BRENTON ANDRUS: Correct. That's my understanding.

LAUREN WOMACK: Is that correct, Julie? Which is why I was advocating that we just kind of go on the defensive.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: But there is a potential-- so just trying to make sure everybody sort of understands so if you don't mind I'll take a second. Well, but to elaborate on what Brenton said, when we develop our budget and the budget goes through the process with the state it has to be balanced. So we have to say this is what we have coming in. This is what we're spending. We can't say that we're going to spend more than we have coming in. So we rely on what's called revenue estimating conference, which meets throughout the year a few times and they give projections based on all the different money that comes into the state. Not just for LDH, but the state as a whole. And if they see, which that's the fiscal cliff Brenton was talking about, if they see that there's anything where there's likely going to be a major reduction in the amount of revenue that we have coming in then we have to account for it on the spending side. Sometimes you'll hear that for those of you who have been around for a while we used to call it midyear budget cuts. Every year in December that was our Christmas present is we have to figure out how to make reductions to our budget. Because at some point they said we're not going to get in as much money as we thought we would so now you have to go figure out how to cut it. These are not things the department wants to do.

So you've seen a lot in the news we do have our hands tied to some degree because there are some things that are whether it's in statute or what not it's mandatory that we pay for. And so the amount, the things that we do have the ability to reduce, and that's what Brenton mentioned was optional programs, are these. So if all things stay the same and the money that's coming in is reduced to the extent that

they think it will be through the conclusion of the sales tax, and maybe potentially other things without us doing any other changes, that's all we can do is say okay, well, we're going to have to look at these reductions to compensate for this less budget. And that does to some, in some ways it can get spread to all the state in some ways. There's always a little bit more of a hit to the Department of Health and the Department of Higher Education because of things that are statutorily in place. But yes, so to answer your question if all things stay the same then yes, we would have to look at reductions in some way. Of course we would continue to work with, you know, stakeholders. There's much debate from different people about where those cuts should or shouldn't come from or can or can't be found. But what we know, and Brian may want to say more from the Medicaid side or Gary happy for you, but is we have to unfortunately look at some tough things if it's 100 million dollars in state general fund like they're projecting it to be.

LAUREN WOMACK: Just to be prepared of what we can expect.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Yeah. Brian, if I said something wrong fix me or if you have anything.

BRIAN BENNETT: No, you are completely on target Julie. And just to kind of reiterate. So with CMS in order to participate in the Medicaid program there are some services that are required services so we do not have the ability to cut those if we want to continue to receive Medicaid funding. And then we have optional services that we have the option to provide or not provide. Unfortunately a large chunk of our home and community-based services are optional services. At least right now they are. So whenever it comes time to look at reducing spending in Medicaid we always look at rates and what services are optional because those are really two of the primary places to look for if we have to make cuts.

And then also what Julie you were saying about revenue and that this was just kind of a point in time. At that moment when this was put together if we had to make a cut of this size this is what we would look at. It might change a little bit throughout the year. Like Julie was saying based upon what revenue estimating

comes back with it could go up or down. And then, of course, I believe they might be considering a special session next month to look at taxes so that also has the potential to affect also the revenue that might be available. So I just wanted to add that.

GARY WILLIAMS: Again, these are not programs or services that the department is looking to cut. It's just those are the ones that are optional that would be on the table should revenue not be available.

ANGELA HARMON: Okay. Thank you, Julie, Brenton, Brian and Mr. Williams for that update. Any questions before we move on? Okay, next on the agenda is an update on Families Helping Families New Orleans. Members, we have been discussing Families Helping Families of NOLA for over a year. The center was on probation due to concerns about center management and functioning which was brought to light in their fiscal year 22 legislative audit. We reduced their funding by half and at the April meeting the council decided to partially restore funding to the center this fiscal year. A lot has happened since our last meeting so I want to turn things over to Brenton and other staff so they can explain what has happened and what action was taken.

BRENTON ANDRUS: I default to other staff. Yeah, so we had a few members that requested more information about our involvement with Families Helping Families of New Orleans. So keep in mind there are two centers in the Greater New Orleans area. There is Families Helping Families of Greater New Orleans which is in Jefferson Parish. We are not talking about that center or any other center in the state. We are specifically talking about Families Helping Families of New Orleans. And at this point everyone knows that we have opted to pull funding. We are not contracting with that center for this fiscal year, fiscal year 25 which started July 1. We did not enter into a contract with them. As Angela stated this center was on probation and a lot of information that we gathered after the July meeting is what sparked our concerns and eventual decision to no longer contract with that center. A few of you have asked for a little more detail like what happened, when did we find out different things so I'll share kind of a timeline of sorts with you.

So at the end of July, so a week and half or so, two weeks after we had our July meeting I was included on some emails from a staff member who had abruptly quit from the center. It was reported that their office environment was toxic. There were accommodations that she had requested that were not provided for or not adequately provided for. She didn't feel supported by management and felt they had failed to provide her with those accommodations. And also accused the director at the time of ableism. Which that director did deny. And then shortly after that I got another email and some subsequent phone calls from another staff member who was sharing a lot more information about what was going on at the center. It had started because this staff member was no longer going to be working there and she was a part of I guess some sort of signature authority on bank accounts that the center had that she was trying to get removed and was having difficulty there. And she had reported that just kind of some of the things that over the past year that we have been told are happening and this particular staff's' version of what that account might actually be.

So for instance she had mentioned the board was not actually doing anything to try to find a replacement for Ms. Johnson who was the director at the time. We had been told they were trying to do a search to find a director. It's my understanding maybe the responsibility to find someone was up to the current director, well, the director at the time and not the board. She had claimed at our July meeting that there was a balanced budget that was passed. There were no layoffs being planned for the center. But shortly after those statements we find out the center is in debt and the center actually had to lay off or terminate all staff because there was not enough funding to pay backpay for the work they had done or for payments to move forward. There was some information thrown out there about different mediations that had to happen between management, staff and the board. Just more of that was kind of speaking to the environment of the particular center.

We were under the impression that the bookkeeper who we were told, you know, didn't do a great job.

That's why the center had fallen into some of these concerns that we had for the audit. We were told that individual had been let go. In this conversation with one of the staff members there we were told that she was never let go. She actually voluntarily moved somewhere else. But she had been on the payroll as recently as July 2024. So a year after we're told this person was fired apparently she was on payroll documentation. We don't know the extent of what that payment was for. We don't know if she was doing any work. We don't have that information. We were also told that whoever does their IT services asked for that bookkeeper's account not to be removed. So again, I don't have any idea if she was actually still working for the center after being told that she was let go. I can't speak to that.

There was some concerns about bonuses. There were bonuses given to some staff, not other staff. There were no performance evals done. They felt like it was kind of a favoritism. If this particular staff was more in line with the director they would get preferential treatment I guess for those bonuses. I was also told that the center was behind on a small business loan and they had to switch phone companies for failure to pay the previous company. Lots of staff turnover. And with this particular staff member I was on some emails going back and forth about getting her final check and she reported to me that Ms. Johnson at the time told her to immediately go and cash the check because she wasn't sure if the funding would be there for that payment.

So that was all sparking some concerns in our mind and we were working on setting up a monitoring visit with Families Helping Families of New Orleans. We do those every year so we were going to do an in-person monitoring visit and that's when we were going to address some of these issues. Figure out what's going on. Because, again, this is just what people were telling me and the emails I was included on to get that information. In August, early August around August 12th or so we were trying to process the contract for Families Helping Families NOLA and we kept getting a statement that there was a tax issue. Now on our end we do not get information about what a tax issue is.

Just there is something that doesn't allow us to process that contract and so we have to tell the director of the center hey, you have this tax issue. You need to fix it. You need to resolve it. Which based on emails it appeared that she was attempting to but I don't know what that exact issue was. But that particular issue was what was kind of delaying the processing of our contract.

And so the next day we were told that the director was going to be going on medical leave for an extended period of time. She was going to be working from home for a while. Kind of letting us know who would be in charge of the center while she's out. And so at that point we had a monitoring visit that we had to put on hold because we were about to do a monitoring visit and she was going to be out. So we have questions for what's going on but we have someone out on medical leave. We can't ask questions. And then two days later we got an abrupt resignation from the director at the time. Ms. Johson, she resigned. She identified the interim ED for the center at that time was going to be Christina Martin. And she informed us she was going to be training her for a few days to kind of get her acclimated to what was going on at the center.

And then at that time we had another phone call from the interim director that told us that multiple staff members had not been paid so they didn't get their backpay for the work they did do. They didn't have any funding coming in currently to be able to pay them for any future work. And so all staff at that time were sent home until further notice. There was some conversations back and forth oh, we hope it's two weeks or we hope to bring them back on Monday but ultimately there wasn't a defined plan to bring them back until they addressed the funding issues.

So around mid-August there was an email that was sent that basically said due to the office transitioning to new leadership and providing time for staff rejuvenation, whatever that is, the office was going to have limited access pretty much from mid-August until beginning of September. And then later that afternoon we got a follow-up phone call from interim ED that went to that center and found staff were shredding papers. The center was in disarray. It

kind of looked like it was ransacked in some of the offices and she couldn't find documentation for the past few years of financial statements and things. Now where all of that information went, I don't know. But if you get where I'm going where there's smoke there's usually fire so we're really having a lot of concerns about our dollars going to this center based on the probationary status, based on this little bit of information we had. And knowing the impacts that giving this center funding would have on all the other centers that we do fund.

So we did ask for a strategic plan pretty much the weekend. So I appreciate the interim ED at the time because we told her on a Friday I said I want a plan on my desk for Monday about what you're doing. How we're going to fix this. And there was a plan, unfortunately it didn't have satisfying details for me. And, you know, I don't think it was going to because she was not able to get that sort of information. She couldn't find documents. It was hard to tell the financial status of the center at that point. And so at that time we decided all right, we're not moving forward with trying to process the contract. We didn't decide not to fund, we just said we're not processing it yet. We need more information.

So then we move into later August, August 19th there were-- oh, so that was the strategic plan was submitted to us on August 19th. And a lot of that was we're going to investigate the financial status of this particular center. Then we moved onto, let's see, around August 21st we had a meeting with the interim director and a few of us here on staff. So we talked about why staff weren't being paid. Why there were negative balances in bank accounts. I think this was the time we learned-- we had been looking at finances. They have to submit financial statements to us every month. And we only got financial statements from a particular bank who we thought they were banking with and we found out there was another account that existed where some of this business went on. So we were told at that time the center was upwards of 200,000-dollars in debit. And all accounts had a negative or past due balance. And there were, let's see, there was also some conversations that were had, it appeared on those

bank statements that a mortgage payment was made twice from this bank account that we didn't know about. And there were other suspicious payments being made to individuals that weren't reported to be on staff and so we don't know what that's about. But the mortgage payments were interesting for us because that center did not have a mortgage. Part of their contracts with Orleans School Board was you had a facility that was rent free. So there were mortgage payments happening. Per the interim ED there was some conversations that it was a mishap. Maybe a business account accidentally got linked to a personal account, a mortgage was paid. And one of our big things were we wanted to have a meeting with the director and the board president at the time to get some information there and figure out how are you holding this individual accountable for I guess paying their mortgage and what's going on with these other payments to people.

Along the way I also found out information that some staff did receive payments and happen to be staff from what I was told that may have been more in line with the director than other staff. Their payments were able to clear. There was enough funding in the overdraft protection to pay those checks but not necessarily all staff. So 8/29, we're at the end of August. We actually had a meeting with the interim director and the board president at the time. At that point so we're talking gosh, almost a month later or right at a month later staff still weren't getting paid. They still hadn't been back paid. They weren't currently working at the center. Layoffs were going to have to occur based on the center finances. They did not know at the time exactly how many people they would have to layoff but their plan was the interim director would pick up the slack and the duties of this particular person. And I would say most FHF directors will tell you they have their plate full and it would be very hard for them to pick up the slack of multiple staff members. That would not work there. And so that was concerning.

They did confirm the center debt. They confirmed that those mortgage payments had been made, at least two of them. They were still working on reviewing financials at that time to see if there was anything

else that was going on. If there were any other payments made. If there was any other misuse or misappropriation of funding. There was no real plan on how you were going to recoup that funding from someone that used it for personal use so we had an issue there. We were also concerned with board accountability. So I can't remember exactly how many people were on that board. I want to say 12, maybe 11. I can't remember exactly. But eight of those individuals that were on the board last year were still on the board. And so we didn't accept really the statement of, you know, we're going to hold people accountable. We're going to get more involved and determine, you know, have more oversight of the processes here because you didn't do it the previous year. You also confirmed that you really didn't know that the center was on probation or the terms around the center's probation. So obviously the oversight was not there and we were not comfortable moving forward with that particular board still in place.

All of these concerns that have been noted. This gross negligence is pretty much the way that we saw it. And you have to remember in this room we know that each Families Helping Families center is its own center. Its own entity. Their each own nonprofit. They are not linked in any sort of way. But the general public doesn't recognize that. And so having issues like this at one center was going to jeopardize the funding and reputation for all centers. And we didn't want to be associated with that because if the state found out that we would not take this sort of action then they would see that we were essentially agreeing to what was going on at that center and we could potentially risk our state dollars. So in that meeting we let them know, and I'm pretty sure going into that meeting, at least I had my mind made up, it was more of a courtesy. We were not going to change our mind. We could not take the risk of funding that particular center based on that information.

And I did find out shortly after we had that meeting their human services district pulled their funding as well. I did send an email over to a couple of their other funders, Department Of Ed, Bureau of Family Health. They had contracts with them and at

that time they had not pulled funding. They were trying to see what they could work out and what supports they could provide to see how they could move forward. I do not have an update on those. I do know, I did speak with Patti. She's on our committee. They have been having significant troubles reaching anyone at that center and they were looking at an alternative plan. I do not have an update on whether Department of Ed was going to try to continue with their contract at that center.

And then August 30th, so that was the day after our meeting, the interim executive director resigned. Keep in mind she had been working there for quite some time and she also had not been paid. To my knowledge I don't know that she has been paid since. The board president at the time also resigned. And so in September, early September we reached out to LDH legal simply to let them know what happened because we would prefer to let you know instead of you coming ask us. We just told them this is what happened, these were our concerns to leave it up to them if they needed to do any sort of additional investigation because we have decided not to contract with this center. They are not obligated to give us anything. We don't have anything in place that says you have to give us an update of what's going on. But we wanted LDH to know that we don't know if any of this funding of ours was used for this. This center also had other grants and dollars so maybe it was, maybe it wasn't ours. We don't know. But just to notify them in case they wanted to do their own assessments and investigations. We have not heard back from them. We did get an email shortly after that said hey, we're passing it off to this individual to see if it falls within their realm of auditing. And we just haven't been able to get an answer from them yet as to what they plan on doing.

I did go on to-- well, I had heard that the center planned to resume operations so I went on the Secretary of State's website and I saw that they had updated their board president. Her name is Renee Horton. And I saw that they had hired a new director, Tiffany Merrick. And I want to say Tiffany worked in the coding program maybe that was at the center. So it looked like maybe they were trying to take steps to

move forward and continue operations. But then last week when we were preparing for this meeting a few people had tried to reach out at one point in time when you would call you would get a phone service and it would say hey, we'll take this information down and we'll get someone to reach back out to you. So I don't know who was answering the phones. But as of last week the phone lines were dead. You couldn't get anyone on the phone. It was just a dial tone. And the website had been suspended. So we don't really know what's going on over there. I don't know if they are planning to try and continue operations. If they have decided to shut down. We don't have that information.

There are some other of their funders that were trying to make contact with them as well and they have been unsuccessful. So again, I don't know if those funders have decided to fund, not fund or a status on the center. But that's pretty much everything. Rekeesha, y'all chime in if I missed anything. But all of that information that we had is what led us to determine that we will not be funding that center. Which I understand is concerning.

There are families in Orleans and St. Bernard and Plaquemines that need assistance. I don't know that they were getting it from this center based on all this information that we had come across. But we have been, when we get calls to our office, trying to refer them to other supports that are in the area. There is also that other center in Greater New Orleans that sometimes they've been able to reach out to. Especially whenever it comes to education issues. So we've been trying to make sure if they reach out to us we have some place to send them to get any kind of support. That's what I got. I'm happy to try to answer questions. I don't know that we have answers but if I do I'll tell you.

LAUREN WOMACK: In hindsight is there anything as a board we can do to prevent something like this in the future?

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, I mean, that is a great question. I don't know. It's kind of hard for us to monitor things when we don't know about them. As a board you said hey, look at their financials every month which we did. We don't have access-- similar to the conversation that we were having earlier about how

you contract with someone and you don't have open access to everything that they do or how they do it or how they operate. And so we are not forensic accountants. We are not investigators. So when things like this happen we do our best to try and figure out which is what started a year, year and a half ago when we started putting them on probation to dig more to see if we could find more.

I would not jump in full speed and start requiring any other centers to do this because we have not had any reason to suspect this was happening anywhere else. Nor is there evidence to support that. Because we do rely, at least for the financial aspects of things, we rely on an audit that all the centers do every year that's pretty comprehensive and that could let us know of any red flags. But mostly a lot of these yes, it is concerning that there is a possibility of misuse of funding and things like that but whenever you tell me that they have no staff, however you got to no staff, you can't fulfill the contractual obligations because you have no one to do it so immediately we have to move on. We're paying you money, someone has to be there to do it. Nobody was there to do it. But I don't know if there's anything necessarily to do differently. I don't know what else we would do differently other than when you have our annual monitoring you get their data monthly. We have their audits.

LAUREN WOMACK: Like you said, you don't want to unjustly punish the ones that have been.

BRENTON ANDRUS: It happens with all businesses, right. Some do great and sometimes you have a bad apple so you just weed that one out.

LAUREN WOMACK: I just didn't know if y'all could think of anything to use as a learning experience.

BRENTON ANDRUS: I don't think so. I mean, there are people out there, because I received the phone calls, that thought we should have pulled their funding a year, a year and a half ago. I stand in agreement that we have their funding and we didn't give them full funding but we gave them some to try to see if those issues could be corrected. And so I think we did our due diligence and I think we made the right decision as the evidence presented itself. Right now I can't think of anything we could have done differently. Because

pretty much uncovering this is through all the processes of what we normally do with other centers.

LAUREN WOMACK: As part of the reason was, like you said, a staff issue and then did they have any red flags in their audits or they were (inaudible)?

BRENTON ANDRUS: What's interesting is so one of the staff members that I spoke about admitted that whenever we went out for our monitoring audit last summer that they felt the director at the time was being unjustly targeted and so they stood up for their director. And so it made it difficult for me to have that phone conversation. But personally I knew something was up. And there was so much other evidence outside of that conversation. We only actually had one staff member on the monitoring audit that I recall that was fairly truthful. Like hey, I'm here for the families. No, management could be better. Processes could be better. And was very truthful about how things were going at the center. But everyone else was pretty much in the corner of the center and the director and so it was really hard after that audit to really come back--

LAUREN WOMACK: Seems like they didn't come out and say it until they weren't paid is the bottom line.

BRENTON ANDRUS: It has been difficult over the last year trying to get that information. I think we were just in a position very quickly over the course of a month to get what we needed to make that determination.

LAUREN WOMACK: Thank you.

ANGELA HARMON: Brooke Stewart.

BROOKE STEWART: Thank you. I just wanted to say thank you, Brenton, for looking into all this and the staff there. I really do appreciate it. It's kind of like y'all are being like investigators even though that's not what y'all thought y'all would have to do. But one thing, did ITAC ever get back to us to let us know if we could pursue like any charges against her? Because in essence it's just like to pay your mortgage with funds for your center, to blatantly lie to your funders and literally she just gets off scot-free. And just oh, I resign. Stole all this money. I resign. I'm gone. And we're just like oh, and now the entire center, as far as I'm concerned, is closed because of

her and does multiple parishes a disservice by now they're being closed, you know. Because she just did what she wanted with the funds. And I'm like I really want, I want her to be under the jail, you know. I can't lie to you. I want her to be under the jail. Like to be on the news and to say like hey, this woman, please do not hire her anywhere else. She will literally take your money and pay her own mortgage. She will hire her friends to be the accountant and be the-- what did you say? The lady who is now the executive director. The one that was over the coding thing.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, I think she worked in their coding program.

BROOKE STEWART: And I'm just like who knows, you know, New Orleans is very connected. It's like one degree of separation from everyone in New Orleans. And I want to know are you related to these people. Are you related to your accountant. Are you related to the coding person. Do you have some type of relationship with the board president to the board to just essentially be okay with the okeydokey. I'm just so distraught that the entire center is shut down. And it is no fault to the LADDC. I think you guys did your due diligence and everything. I'm just so disgusted with this lady. And we should really say her name. What's her last name? Aisha Johnson. No one needs to hire her for anything to do with money. She shouldn't even be a cashier at Rouses. I wouldn't even trust her with a nickel. Okay. I am done. Thank you.

BRENTON ANDRUS: I will say, just to throw it out there, most of this information it's alleged. We don't have, you know, any criminal aspect to confirm that this did happen. We just know what we were told by individuals that worked there what was going on. As far as if there's anything we could do, no. We are under Department of Health so our lawyers, our legal team is LDH legal so we've made them aware. And at that point it's up to them to decide if there's anything that they would want to do. But we as staff there's not something we could do ourselves.

BROOKE STEWART: Can I be acknowledged one more time? I'm sorry.

ANGELA HARMON: Sure. Go ahead Brooke.

BROOKE STEWART: I'm sorry to interrupt, Brenton, but it is just so disgusting that she could really take this money. It's just not matching up. Allegedly she could take the money and nothing happen to her. She could be in the Swiss Alps right now on our dime and nothing can happen to her. I don't know. I hope someone is logged in on this meeting so they know what kind of person she is because clearly she cannot sustain a life without a job somewhere. And I just hate that she's going to do this to the next organization. Okay, sorry.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you, Brooke. Does anyone else have any questions?

SPEAKER: So just to come back at what she was saying. I do agree that there should be some kind of consequence for the actions that were allegedly taken. And I know you said that you want to see her on the news and everything but like Brenton said earlier people in this room understand that we have ten separate entities that are Families Helping Families centers but the general public doesn't know that and we would hate to do a disservice to the disabled community by making people think oh, it's all of them. So before you go calling the news stations please keep that in mind.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you. Mr. Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: At first when we gave her half of the money back I was against it. I was totally against it because it didn't sit right with me. And not just the center being closed, it's hurting a lot of people that's disabled that needs that center for her to just walk away and nothing be done. We just doing this to thank you very much. It shouldn't go that way. It's something that we need to do where it needs to be looked at further than this.

Now all these centers shouldn't be hurt for it but she needs to be accountable for what she has done. When I said it at the beginning, don't give it to her. Do not. We need to watch the center more before we make the decision. Oh, we're going to give her a chance. But when you stick your hand in the cookie jar and see a situation you're going to get bit. Now people got bit because of this. She shouldn't just walk away like that. No. Whatever needs to be done it

needs to be done. Paying your house note, I got a house note. I need clothes.

BROOKE STEWART: She paid it twice, Erick, twice.

ERICK TAYLOR: Twice. Come on now. I specifically said no. She came in here with a few papers blah, blah, blah, blah. Couldn't explain nothing blah, blah, blah. We working on it. We getting a new person to look at the books. We never met that new person. Now we're to this. Where do we go from here. She needs to be dealt with.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you, Mr. Taylor. Jill.

JILL HANO: I'm assuming because it's FHF she has a child or children with a disability. So that's the most puzzling and upsetting part is to take money from the disabled community. But like when you have a personal investment and you have a child with a disability it's just so upsetting.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Just what's puzzling me is that I know all the other centers we're required to get an independent CPA and I'm hearing this was going on for over a year. Did they not have an independent CPA, or I'm sorry, audit that was done, a financial audit?

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yes, that's what put them on probation with us. So what would have been caught this past year, the concerns, that audit has not been done yet because y'all are at the point right now where you would be engaging that auditor.

SPEAKER: Yeah, we are. But if there was a concern all along you don't wait for a year.

BRENTON ANDRUS: That's what put them on probation. These are our concerns. What are you doing to address them and then we develop a corrective action plan--

SPEAKER: Within a six-month period.

BRENTON ANDRUS: They have been on probation for a year. This happened over this past month for us to make a determination that we're pulling funding.

SPEAKER: Okay. What I was trying to match up I was hearing that these issues were going on for over a year and a half.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, a year, year and a half. I can't remember the exact time that we started. But somewhere in that time period.

SPEAKER: And the audit report, financial audit--

BRENTON ANDRUS: I will say the issues we did not have information like this that I presented to you. The issues were at one point in time yes, there were some payments made to staff that were bounced. There were some payday loans to staff with no policies in place about how do you pay it back. There were some issues about them not keeping up with their books so they were running into these situations of not having funding because they weren't collecting payments from other contractors or grantees because they weren't keeping up the books. So it's those types of things. More of a mismanagement issue and not potential criminal issues like the information that we've been told. So that takes it to a different level.

SPEAKER: And the last of the question has still not been investigated and confirmed. Did I hear that?

BRENTON ANDRUS: We have some confirmations from the interim director at the time and the board president at the time when we made a decision to pull funding. That they confirmed some of the things that were being told to us. But there are some things also that were being told that I don't have a way to confirm that. For instance, I never saw a payroll where the old bookkeeper was still on there July 2024. In fact, the monthly statements that we would get were prepared by this agency that Ms. Johnson stated would be their new bookkeeper agency. There was some concerns they were going to have to pay a lot of money for this person but they wanted to resolve the issues.

But again, I don't know if information sent to us was manipulated in any sort of way. Because I do recall seeing statements that said this is how much we paid this person, that person, and that bookkeeper was never on there. And the accounts were also not in the red. But apparently there was some things done in an account that we did not know they had and did get confirmation from their president and intermediate at the time that these people were on the payroll somehow.

SPEAKER: Because with nonprofit organizations there are accountability issues or points in which you can find that information out. If these things were happening and all these people were involved she's not the only one accountable or should be held accountable. I'm hearing the pieces but some things don't match up.

There are systems put in place to ensure that the public trust is not violated with a nonprofit organization. So while we may have some issues with the individual, it's not just the individual because there are systems in place that's supposed to have certain checks and balances. And if all of those fall through they all have some accountability.

BRENTON ANDRUS: We were also told they had a finance committee and we received notes from this particular finance committee when they met but from what I recall whenever I had a conversation with the board president she was not aware of a finance committee. So I don't know if that was just she was not involved in it or what. But I can tell you part of our big reason for-- because they did ask when we had the meeting give us a chance, this is a new director, a new board president, give us a chance and we said no, again, because I do think the board is also someone that is accountable for this. And if 75 percent of your board is still in place you can't tell me to give you a chance because I gave them a chance. And for you to have been an officer, I forget what position she held and now president and not know the center was on probation and not know the extent of our involvement there was zero oversight. So I do think there were a lot of people or individuals, entities, whatever you want to call it that should be held accountable. I cannot say that that's not happening. I don't know. We have not received an update from this center since mid to late August. Whatever that date was that we pulled funding. So I don't know if anyone has done anything to address what has happened with the director. I don't know if the board has done anything.

LAUREN WOMACK: We're not paying them so we're not privy to that.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, they're not obligated to share. But we can't even get people on the phone so we can't even call and ask.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: I was going to take us in a different direction so I don't know if you want to finish on the audit. It's not necessarily about the audit but I would like to talk a little bit about what happens now in New Orleans but I don't know if you want to finish any comments on the audit.

VIVIENNE WEBB: So while this is an important issue everything that staff can do has been done about it and there's not much else in our control. We need to look forward for this legislative session and protect the funding and try our best not to risk it because it would look really bad if it was on the news that an FHF center was like embezzling funds or stealing funds. And we don't want to give the government a reason to take that funding with who is in charge right now.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: I was just going to say kind of again, in a different direction. And Erick I think alluded to this. So there's people in New Orleans who may need the services that Families Helping Families was giving that may not be getting it now. I don't know are there any actions that as council members-- I don't know how to get the Families Helping Families designation, for example. So is there anything the council should do or do we just have to wait until either they get better or somebody else comes along that can get with families. I'm just trying to think about the people in New Orleans and how do we make sure that now that funding is gone and they're gone is there anything, and it may be there is nothing we can do, but is there anything we can do to help facilitate another entity or another Families Helping Families being able to do that in New Orleans. I'm not sure.

BRENTON ANDRUS: So there's a couple, I don't want to say options because I don't know what is actually an option, but there's a couple of thoughts I have and then we'll have to move along because we're out of time. And I don't want to get too involved in what is said or not said about the center. But there is a center that is in Jefferson Parish, Greater New Orleans. I do not know if they would be interested in contracting with us. They did not previously. It's under new management now. So that may be an option that we can see if they are interested and would they be willing to cover some of those areas that we have gaps.

The other thing about the council has, and people have brought it up in the past, we've put information out trying to create new centers in areas where there's a need. I would say that's not necessarily off the table but right now based on the information we had if

we would have done that if would look like we had three FHF centers in New Orleans. Which New Orleans cannot support three FHF centers. Our funding alone cannot support a standalone center. Our funding alone probably wouldn't even pay the executive director's salary solely. Or if it would there would be no admin costs after that. So we needed to find out, and we still do need to try to find out, what is FHF NOLA's intention. Are they still operating. Are they still going to be there. Have they shut down. If they've shut down then there are other contracts. Where are those going. Have those gone anywhere. Are those up for grabs. Then maybe we can have another conversation with those other funders to get a commitment from them. Because again, we can't start up a center by ourselves. We have to have the other funders with us. And so if that funding is available then maybe collectively we can try to figure out someone that would start a new Families Helping Families center there or try to see if we can partner with the one that already exist. That's a process of conversation.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you. Thank you, everyone. Mr. Erick. After this we need to move on.

ERICK TAYLOR: Do we have anything in our bylaws to protect us if anything like this happens again?

BRENTON ANDRUS: I mean, nothing happened to the council.

ERICK TAYLOR: I'm talking about like if we fund somebody and a situation that we used to pull until we really, really see.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Yeah, I mean, all of our contracts we have a clause in there that we can pull them. We can agree to enter into a contract with you. We can also take that money back. We don't have to have it in the bylaws. That's just how we write our contracts.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you. Now we will move onto our contractual activities. Hannah, will you start us off with Partners in Policymaking, Youth Leadership and co-occurring disorder initiative.

HANNAH JENKINS: Yes. Obviously you have some of those updates in your status report. We do have, let's see, we finished recruiting for the 2025 Partners in Policymaking class. We had 55 applications, which is a very large number which is exciting for Partners to

have that many applications. And those are the ones received by the deadline. We actually had 22 come in afterward that we encouraged to apply again next year because we had more than enough of a job to select. The selection committee met last week. This is something that is not in your status report because it's new but they were able to select 24 participants. Another great number we had is we have six self-advocates that will be attending Partners which I believe is the largest we've ever had apply and largest we ever had attend as far as self-advocates so that's exciting.

And of course a lot of that can be attributed to the fact there was additional funding given to Partners. And I can vouch that it's definitely needed with this many, especially with self-advocates, that there does tend to be a little higher of a cost when it comes to support workers, needing an individual room as opposed to sharing. There's other things that make that cost a little bit higher. But because of the funding we were able to accept all six self-advocates that applied.

And they're a good spread throughout the regions. About two to three in each region is kind of how it averages. I'll give exact numbers later because we're already running a little late. But a good mix. And we do have a couple dads, three dads this time so that's always great to have the dads getting involved. And Partners will be starting in January so at our next meeting we will be able to give you a few more updates but that's been great.

The Youth Leadership Forum-- any questions on Partners? Cool. Youth Leadership Forum. I'm not going to recap everything that's in the status report but one of the big things they were able to accomplish during this past quarter was they were able to get their website up and running. It's layouthleadershipforum.org. So now there's a one-stop shop to be able to see what's going on. When the next program is. Which the program will be July 10th through the 13th. They found that July seemed to be a better month. Didn't have as many conflicting schedules as June did. They also did move. They're no longer going to be at the University of Louisiana

Lafayette. There were some accessibility issues amongst other things so they are moving.

JILL HANO: (Inaudible).

HANNAH JENKINS: I'm giving you updates that happened since the status report but it's 1.1.8. They will be at LSUE this upcoming year. And from what we've heard they're very excited. They've had good discussions with the university so maybe this will be their new home. Any questions on YLF?

And navigating the systems. They are wrapping up their trainings. Their final training was scheduled in September. I don't have the update yet. I haven't gotten that report. But they have completed all of their training sessions for the four different topics that they've been brought over. Person-centered trauma informed care, de-escalation in times of behavioral crisis. You have the list. They completed everything. Any questions?

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you, Hannah. Appreciate it. Now Rekeesha, can you give us an update on LaCAN, Families Helping Families and the voting initiative?

REKEESHA BRANCH: Yes. First, we have LaCAN. As of September 2024 LaCAN has over 6,719 individuals registered for the council and LaCAN list serve to receive information and action alerts related to home and community-based services. Employment, education and early intervention. As of October 1st, 2023, we've had 22 LaCAN action alerts and nine yellow shirt days. As far as action alerts we've had 1,732 people to take action with nine yellow shirt days. We had 168 people in attendance with 12 testimonies provided. With trainings and meetings that's July 1st, 2024, there's been a total of 13 community input meetings conducted by LaCAN leaders and FHF directors with a total of 131 individuals in attendants to discuss concerns and ideas on the 2025 legislative advocacy agenda. LaCAN leaders and FHF directors also participated in the 2025 legislative kickoff which was held on September the 17th. Advocacy leaders discussed, prioritized and rated over 80 concerned issues to generate the top items that their official recommendations towards the council's 2025 legislative advocacy agenda had. And LaCAN also continues to host two LaCAN leader conference calls per month which include updates, and

concerns, and issues and development of strategies. That's pretty much it with LaCAN. Any questions, comments, concerns?

JILL HANO: Any issues came from-- oh, sorry, Angela. May I speak?

ANGELA HARMON: Yes, Jill.

JILL HANO: Any issues came out of the community input meeting?

REKEESHA BRANCH: Yes, the agenda topics. Yes. So the topics that y'all will discuss and vote on on tomorrow, that's what came out of the community input meetings.

JILL HANO: All right. Cool.

REKEESHA BRANCH: And the next thing we're going to talk about is the FHF centers. All right. Since October the 1st, 2023, centers have assisted over 35, I'm sorry, 37,000 individuals with disabilities and families with information, referral, peer-to-peer and other supports. There has been over 65,000 units of information and referrals completed with 382 trainings conducted with 8,306 individuals in attendance. Centers have conducted over a total of 690 outreaches to hospitals, pediatricians, school districts, applied behavior analyst clinics and physical therapy clinics.

Also attached to the report, and I'll go ahead and share my screen, we have the end of the year report for Families Helping Families with everybody's final numbers as far as what they were able to do for the year. We actually have four centers that did not meet their deliverable. Bayou Land Families Helping Families was unable to meet their deliverable for grassroot advocacy and also individuals identified for legislative visits. But for that particular center there was a change in the director within that same, well, within this year so the transition was kind of difficult with making sure everything was handled by the end of the year.

For Southwest Louisiana they were unable to meet their deliverable of legislative visits with the director. For this particular center there was difficulties with having the legislators commit to the meeting because of the session and everything going on and a lot of the legislators would cancel on them.

And for region seven she was unable to meet her

deliverable for the individuals identified for legislative visits and also her legislative visits for the director. And for this particular center she already put something in place where she has an in-house employee that's going to help make sure that that doesn't happen moving forward with scheduling her meetings and making sure they identify people for their testimonies.

And for New Orleans Families Helping Families they did not meet their deliverable for their surveys and that's because they did not turn in their last quarter information. They were no longer with us by this time. So that's it for that.

I also attached to the document the first quarter information. It's going to pull up in just a second. All right. So for this particular form just remember this form was created on the second and they do not turn in their quarterly information to me until the 10th of the month. So some of this information is not completely updated, but I can assure you everybody is on track to make sure they'll have everything done by the end of the year. So any questions about Families Helping Families?

JILL HANO: I do have a question but it is for your deputy director. Can you get us a specific date that y'all pulled the FHF NOLA contract? I was told that it would be reported today.

BRENTON ANDRUS: I did say it. It was August 29th.

JILL HANO: Oh, my bad. Sorry.

BRENTON ANDRUS: It was August 16th that we decided to kind of halt the process of doing the contract till we got more information. But August 29th was the official statement that we provided to management at the time that we would not be contracting.

ANGELA HARMON: Any other questions, comments, concerns on FHH?

REKEESHA BRANCH: So we will move forward with disability voting rights. So for this particular contract we agreed to have ten statewide training opportunities and one web-based. So as of October 2023 one web-based training has occurred with four participants being in attendance and seven in-person trainings and that was with 240 participants in attendance. The in-person training sessions included

representatives from the Secretary of State office to provide hands-on experience with the voting machines used for both early voting and election day voting. As you can see on the chart I was not able to get September's information just yet. Again, this was provided to me after on the 10th of this month so you guys will get this chart on next quarter with all of the information on it. Any questions, comments, concerns about disability voting rights? All right.

ANGELA HARMON: Thank you, Rekeesha. Now Brenton will you give us an update for the remaining initiatives?

BRENTON ANDRUS: Sure. This will be the last year, these two contracts, because it's their final year. Dealing with the first responder pilot. So that's activity 2.2.1. As you recall this is our fourth and final year contracting with Interaction Advisory Group to conduct these first responder sessions. Our trainings were originally scheduled to be in person but we have struggled this year to get any sort of interest in this particular initiative. So then we pivoted to virtual trainings to see if that would help. We still did not get a lot of first responders to participate in those trainings. So then towards the end we started offering a virtual, I think the contractor called it a caregiver master class. Sort of a reverse content, if you will. The first responder training was kind of dealing with how should you be interacting with individuals with a disability and kind of signs to look out for.

And then the caregivers there were some things that they needed to know about. Addressing issues like wandering, eloping, how do you interact with law enforcement, what are your plans if something happens. I mean, just in general we've talked about it at every meeting so far and it's unfortunate but this initiative that many of you enjoyed, and we had great success with in previous years, we just did not have success this year. I think we had a total of 17 individuals that were trained for the entire year. Compare that to we trained over 1100 people over the course of this particular initiative. So was this year successful, no, but I think the initiative in general was very successful. We shared with you throughout all the

meetings various feedback we received from people that participated in the trainings talking about how their mindset has changed and how their departments are doing things that's changed. We did offer those master class events for our self-advocates, family members, caregivers. We had an LADDC news that was sent out about that. And there were a lot of people that registered but in the end only seven of them participated in the training. So we have probably five times as many people registered for it and seven show up. That was unfortunate.

Why did we not have success this year, I don't know. I know our contractor has tried to make connections. I want to say I don't remember when exactly I reported it but there was a lawsuit that was being settled, I believe in Jefferson Parish, at the end of 2023. But that was going to possibly change the trainings that officers were going to have to participate in. And so the contractor really believes that given the success we've had in previous years that that may have stopped agencies from wanting to participate because they may have some requirements coming up and they want to make sure they follow those requirements. Even though they may not happen in Jefferson Parish what ripple affect does that lawsuit have. So that could have been a possibility. We also trained 1100 people. It's very possible the people that were interested we captured in three years and a fourth was not necessarily needed. So y'all, as in the council, made a good decision I think in utilizing this funding for other projects moving forward instead of funding this again. Because I know that was something that some of y'all really wanted to do but I do think it has run its course and we moved on.

Our final initiative that was the emergency preparedness and response training. That's activity 2.2.2. We have been partnering with Niagara University for the last four years to host their emergency management disability awareness training here in our state. They contract with other councils. We were one of the first, not the first, but we were one of the initial councils to start contracting with them. They started picking up on a lot more contracts after they started contracting with us as well. So they've really

been involved with quite a few DD Councils but they have always said that our state has always had the most participation. We did not get as much participation from emergency managers as we would have liked. We did this year but it's been a struggle for the first three years to get those individuals involved. But we also got a lot of folks, caregivers, self-advocates that were really involved in this particular training as well. Which is great because they can utilize the information as well.

During this quarter we had two trainings that were done in Lafayette. That was September 9th through 10th and then we did Shreveport 11th through 12th. And if those dates sound familiar that was Hurricane Francine. So our Lafayette training we did see kind of a dip in the amount of people that participated. So in the two-day training there were 23 that were registered, ten actually attended. And then for the half day 11 were registered, only one attended. The first day they were able to do in person and at that point in time the track was still kind of in that Acadiana area so our contractor left early, went to Shreveport and they did a virtual, a second day instead of in person. But the training was able to occur.

And then our Shreveport training not much was going on up there so lots of people showed up that registered. Twenty-three registered for the two-day training, 20 of them attended. Nine registered for the half day, two in attendance. If you participated in this training you probably get emails from the contractor from time to time. He is offering a webinar on November 12th from 1 to 2:30 p.m. It's free. Registration is required. If you participated in this training, if you did not this webinar is not for you, this is for individuals that have been through training and are looking for a refresher, looking to get updated information. If you go on our 2024 council meeting page under the status of planned activities you'll find the link in there for the registration. You know, Dave our contractor has always said just because we're not contracting it doesn't mean he leaves the state. And that is true. He randomly will do throughout the year these kind of updated webinars that all people that have participated in this training, whenever you

participated would be eligible to attend and get some of that updated and refreshed information.

So in total this year we trained about 68 people. And for the entire four years of the initiative we've had 570 individuals that have been trained. So I would say it was a successful initiative. And if you never attended and missed out (inaudible) training. Lots of information. I may still have a manual or two leftover. But yeah, so that's all I have. I don't know if we have any questions.

ANGELA HARMON: Any questions? Any comments? Thank you, Brenton. Please note after this meeting our education and employment committee will be meeting in this room. Also, tomorrow is the full council meeting which starts at 8:30. We will also be in the same room. Those who have registered to participate virtually should have the links in their emails. Also, there are two things we will discuss at the January meeting that you need to be thinking about. First, we'll be looking at ideas and activities you may want the council to consider adding to its next annual plan which will go into effect October 1st, 2026. We are responsible for goals one and two so please make sure your activities fall into that particular area. Secondly, we will also discuss new concepts and ideas for the council to consider when we start developing our next five-year plan which will be in affect fiscal year 27. It will be (inaudible) the following area of emphasis. Quality assurance, housing and informal/formal community supports. Ideally your concepts and ideals should be specific to any issues you want to address. Any strategies to address the issues and desired outcomes. Does anyone on the committee have any other announcements to make?

BRENTON ANDRUS: I'm just going to say those were very important details for the January meeting otherwise we will just sit in this little square and stare at each other if you don't come up with ideas because that's part of your role, right. You have the annual plan that's coming up that we're going to need specific activities for. What do you want to do. What do you want to focus on. And then the generalized concepts or broad, big picture stuff. What do you want to focus on over the course of five years. And then in

your annual planning you still start determining how you meet those goals. But those are things that you need to be thinking about. Things that are concerning to you or people you know so we can throw those out at the next meeting. Spend a good time doing it.

LAUREN WOMACK: Brenton, are there things on ITAC that tell us things to think about as council members? Guidance about what should be on the plan?

BRENTON ANDRUS: I would defer to Stephanie but not really.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Not really. There's just like umbrella things like housing. Kind of like what those concepts would fall under. Education, inclusion, self-determination. So really just big overarching ideas but then we can get more specific. So if there is something that you're like oh, you know what we really want to tackle this kind of thing then that would be something to bring. Does that make a little bit more sense? And then we kind of talk from there. Oh, I'm sorry, Ebony.

EBONY HAVEN: I wanted to add to that. So it's really, y'all's plan is really based on your comprehensive review analysis. So that's what we're doing when we're doing those public forums that are going to be coming up. So we're meeting with the DD network I want to say next week to try and figure out dates for those. But it's really specific to the state. Each state is different.

LAUREN WOMACK: So should we look at like legislative agendas in the past? Maybe just like the themes of them.

EBONY HAVEN: I mean, I don't know if we specifically look at like past legislative agendas for your state, yeah.

JULIE FOSTER HAGAN: Isn't it more like what you might want us to have funding for or what might you want to advocate for but not necessarily just through legislation?

LAUREN WOMACK: I know we can do trainings but that's all I really know (inaudible).

EBONY HAVEN: Oh, so there's three mandates. So systems change, advocacy and the third one is slipping my mind for some reason.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Capacity building.

EBONY HAVEN: Capacity building, yes. So that's training.

LAUREN WOMACK: What are some maybe other examples. Can we have people come in and do like impact studies or that's beyond this?

BRENTON ANDRUS: That's more of a specific, right. So let's say your five-year thinking you want to address housing but maybe in your annual plan you decide to contract with someone that can do some sort of study that can determine the specific path to address that housing in future years. Now I will say what the council has done in the past, unfortunately, is you might do that and then you don't follow through on your agenda the following year because you go with what other people want to be addressed that year. But maybe not necessarily a follow-up of what you looked at the year before. So it would be a commitment to do those things. But that would certainly give you the information you need to go to the legislature and request things. Our testimonies from advocates are really good but if you have data and things. And that's kind of outside of the capacity of staff quite a bit. So if you can find those things that you're really interested in then we can put out proposals to see who would be able to provide us with that study. And also if you want to focus more on the education and employment side of things for the five year or the annual plan I would recommend that after this meeting in January you stay to participate in the education meeting because they will talk about that in that meeting. Share your thoughts.

ANGELA HARMON: Anyone else has any comments? All right. I hereby adjourn this meeting at 2:49.