



**Board Meeting Minutes  
October 23, 2025  
10am to 12 Noon EST**

**Attendees:** Bambi Smith, Teresa Roberts, Arthur Cullen, Keith Dean, Bruce Foster, Liz Holifield, Rendy Lovelady, Denise Myers, Ronald Pickett, Michelle Salzman, Charlie Strickland, Gerald Waters, Mike Watkins, Courtney Stanford, Rae Kerr, Sharron Washington, Charles McDonald, Kelly Faircloth, Amy Cliburn, Maureen Castano, Kate Palazeski, Tara Taylor, Lisa Carden, Shawna Peterson, Senator Darryl Rouson, Natalie Kelly, Paul Beebee, Jack Brewer, Andra' Robinson, Jennifer Blackburn, Jillian Jameson, Bibi Ramos, Kristi Lock

**I. Welcome and Chair's Remarks**

**Bambi Smith**

President Smith called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM. It was noted that a quorum was present.

**II. Consent Agenda**

**Bambi Smith**

A. Review and Approval of Minutes

1. Board of Directors
2. Executive Committee
3. Finance Committee

B. Review Performance Child Welfare/Behavioral Health

C. Media Coverage

D. Policy Review

President Smith asked if there were any questions about the Consent Agenda. No questions were asked. Secretary/Treasurer Cullen made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda. Director Waters seconded the motion. All approved, motion passed.

**III. Review and Approval of Finance Committee Report**

**Rae Kerr**

A. 25-26 FY

Budget to Actual reports for NWFHN major contracts (Pages 56-61). As of August, all contracts reflect a slight surplus in expenditures compared to the prorated budget. AJ500 has a surplus of \$394,000, BJ102 has a surplus of \$206,000, AHME2 has a surplus of \$4.3 million, Sunshine has a surplus of \$9,000, Fatherhood has a surplus of \$120,000, SAMSHA has a surplus of \$10,000.

While all contracts are currently in a surplus, this is expected to fluctuate throughout the year. Two risks were noted for AJ500 and BJ102: carryforward amounts remain estimates pending finalization by DCF, with closeout expected soon, and residential group care expenditures are significantly over budget in both contracts; operations staff are addressing causes and mitigation strategies.

BJ102 budget assumed the use of certain AHME funds, previously approved for use by the Department. These funds may not be approved for this use by the Department this year. Combined with increased residential group care costs, this presents a potential budget shortfall. Based on prior funding model analysis, BJ102 remains underfunded by approximately \$5-6 million dollars. The Department has been notified that, without these funds, additional assistance through the risk pool or back-of-the-bill funding may be required.

Director Waters asked how this affects C1 specifically. Rae advised that, consistent with other circuits, residential group care costs are a primary driver of potential deficit in C1. There was discussion about steps being taken to address this issue in all circuits, including increasing foster home capacity, identifying reasons why licensed foster homes are not currently taking children, and ensuring children in group care placement truly require that level of care. Courtney also advised that the new Faith Liaison, Emma Kyle, is engaging the faith community with a focus on foster home recruitment.

Vice President Roberts asked about the capacity for trauma-informed care. Courtney advised NWFHN's combined relationship with behavioral health providers helps with this. There was discussion about the acuity of children entering in care, as well as the efforts to get those who can be in traditional foster homes out of group care. Director Waters acknowledged Molly's team, and the assignment of a team member to work with each foster family to help them through challenges, has helped C1 tremendously.

Board members discussed ongoing budget frustrations and funding model challenges. Director Pickett expressed concern from a business perspective. Mike discussed the issues with the state's current funding model. Courtney shared with the board that, even as NWFHN continues active dialogue with DCF leadership on funding issues, relationships with Contract Managers Shawna Peterson and Lisa Carden remains strong, and they are complimentary of NWFHN's transparency and performance. Vice President Roberts asked about the budget reflecting the funding issue. Rae advised that regular reports are provided to the Department that clearly show the projected positions. Vice President Roberts also raised concerns about other areas of the state receiving disproportionate

funding and Mike advised that this remains an ongoing topic of discussion with state leadership. Mike asked the board to advocate for a rational funding model with their state legislators.

Rae finished out the budget discussion with the budget to actual reports for Administration, Program Administration, and Facilities (Pages 62-77). All areas are showing a surplus or near break-even, contributing to the overall surplus through August. Rae expressed appreciation to Shawna Peterson and Lisa Carden for their role in maintaining cash flow, and to Amy, Kate, Maureen, and their teams for ensuring timely submission of invoices.

Rae informed the board of the ongoing audit by Ernst & Young. The audit team conducted an on-site visit and staff who participated were commended. Sample requests from the audit team continue, with the final report due to the Department by November 14 and to the Governor by December 1. The board was also informed of the on-site COA visit scheduled for next week.

There were no further questions or discussions by the board.

President Smith moved to accept the financial report as submitted. Director Waters seconded the motion. All approved, motion passed.

#### IV. **Strategic Discussions**

**Mike Watkins**

##### A. Annual Priorities

The first draft of the NWFHN Annual Report was provided to the board. Courtney walked the board through the information provided in the report and advised to let her or Kristi know of any requested edits or additions.

There were no questions asked about the annual report. Secretary/Treasurer Cullen moved to accept the annual report. Director Holifield seconded the motion. All approved, motion passed.

Courtney invited the board to the November 20<sup>th</sup> All Teams meeting in Marianna and advised the annual awards will be given out at that event.

##### 1. NWFHN Strategic Updates

**Courtney Stanford**

The COA on-site visit is scheduled for next Monday-Wednesday. NWFHN has maintained accreditation for nearly 20 years, and preparation for this visit has

been ongoing for the past two years. President Smith and Secretary/Treasurer Cullen will participate, and other board members were welcomed and encouraged to attend.

Mike advised the board that Board Director Rep. Salzman is sponsoring a bill on high acuity, which is designed to place children based on a true needs assessment. Rep. Salzman spoke on the value of the NWFHN national event held in Sandestin, which highlighted the complexity of the issue. Mike noted that representatives from 12 states attended the conference and confirmed the high acuity challenge is a common issue. Rep. Salzman expressed her commitment to advancing the bill and recognized Mike as a key navigator of the bill.

Courtney informed the board that Senator Darryl Rouson will be attending today's board meeting and will be at the Bay County Jail tomorrow, viewing NWFHN programs there.

Mike told the board that Jack Brewer's team has collaborated closely with the NWFHN Fatherhood team to support a high-acuity teen in care, specifically commending Andra' and Jennifer from Jack's team for their dedicated investment in the teen.

Mike provided an update on Texas, noting that Texas Health Network has been created and a CBC is being established in Texas. The bid is expected to open soon and there will be 20 months to secure the bid, finalize the model, and present it to the Texas Legislature. Secretary/Treasurer Cullen inquired about the legislative budget and Mike confirmed that it has been passed.

## 2. C2 Update

**Charles McDonald**

National Adoption Day in Circuit 2 is scheduled for November 12, and the Home for the Holidays event will be held December 19 at 10:00 AM at the Leon County Courthouse.

NWFHN is currently serving 854 children in C2 in a combination of in-home and out-of-home care. A review of in-home cases by the NWFHN Quality Team indicated that approximately 30% should probably have never come into care. This highlights the need to focus on family supports to safely exit these children from care.

Weekly tracking of children entering versus exiting care shows that, while exits have historically exceeded entries, recent weeks have seen slightly more entries than exits, putting a focus on safely exiting children from out-of-home care. A recent uptick in kids running away has been noted. Due to this, case managers have prioritized building strong relationships and contacts with these children, resulting in a reduction in runaway incidents and continued communication with those who do leave care.

NWFHN is working to complete the implementation of CORE in all counties and has trained just under 200 law enforcement officers through the CIT program.

There were no questions from the board.

The board was advised that the C1 Adoption contract was terminated with FFN and Children's Home Society will be taking over November 1. Director Waters asked where the group would be working from and was advised that they have offices within the counties across the circuit.

Mike welcome Natalie Kelly, statewide director of FAME, and Jack Brewer to the meeting. Jack provided an update on his team's work, expressing excitement about expanding partnership with NWFHN. He emphasized their shared commitment to support youth in care and the importance of connecting children with peers who have lived experience.

Senator Darryl Rouson was welcomed to the meeting and was presented with a Legislative Hero Award for his long-standing advocacy in mental health and substance abuse. Senator Rouson shared his background and asked the board about legislative needs. Mike discussed the challenges related to substance abuse and the need for effective treatment solutions. The board discussed the need for budget flexibility and Senator Rouson expressed a willingness to address the funding challenges.

Natalie Kelly commended NWFHN's collaboration with the sheriff's offices across its circuits, noting that the positive impact is being noticed across the state.

Director Strickland reflected on his time serving on the board and praised the outreach worker program within the sheriff's offices funded by NWFHN. He urged

Senator Rouson to advocate for organizations that demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness and encourage greater flexibility in their budgets.

Secretary/Treasurer Cullen commended Senator Rouson for sharing his personal story and thanked him for his service. Director Holifield commended Senator Rouson's presentation at this year's DCF Summit.

V. **Review Governance**

**Bambi Smith**

A. Status of Directors

1. Reappointment of Member(s) –  
Arthur Cullen (12/14/2025)  
Denise Myers (12/14/2025)

Secretary/Treasurer Cullen and Director Myers both agreed to be reappointed to the board and recused themselves from the vote. All approved, none opposed. Both were reappointed to the board for a two-year term.

VI. **Next Meeting:**

December 11, 2025, at 10am CST in Panama City.

VII. **Adjourn**

**Bambi Smith**

President Smith adjourned the meeting at 12:25 PM EST.