

The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) is in a very unique position to create a new approach to human services and needs based programs in this State. We recognize, more than ever, the need to work with families holistically rather than simply determining eligibility and waiting for self-sustainability. Our staff approaches an individual who walks into an MDHS office with the understanding they are not asking for a “hand-out” but in fact, they are asking for a “hand-up.”

MDHS is collaborating with other agencies and stakeholders to build a better Mississippi. We began in 2016 by focusing our efforts on the four priorities described below, and we are reengineering our offices to offer a multi-generational, collaborative approach.

- Invest in children and families through workforce development and training;
- Improve opportunities for individuals to make healthy self-sustaining choices;
- Increase department capacity and efficiencies; and
- Improve systems.

The priorities listed above align with our mission for a more effective, efficient, and open government. Focusing on these priorities will allow the state to realize the commonalities between social capital, health and well-being, economic supports, education, and training which will ultimately all the state to maximize its resources by eliminating duplication of services.

INVEST IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

MDHS’ success will be measured by the success of the clients served by the agency. A family-centered, multi-generational approach will be developed to invest in early intervention programs that will improve life outcomes for children and families. MDHS is doing this through the support of early involvement in case decision-making, and providing access to activities which lead to livable wages through higher education including vocational and technical training. The MDHS approach continues to recognize the importance of the family unit as it relates to the overall success of each of the members of the household.

The county MDHS offices are going through major changes to accommodate the case management approach to all individuals receiving services through the programs offered. We will be reducing the number of Eligibility Workers and increasing the number of Case Managers to accomplish our multi-generational approach. We have already seen more cost and customer efficiencies without creating an overall increase in staffing.

MDHS has proven through the years that we are very proficient in determining eligibility timely, accurately, and efficiently. However, the mentality of simply moving individuals in-and-out must be replaced with an effort to move them to self-sustainability. Assisting individuals with a needs based program is providing them with a supplemental or temporary support as they move to initial employment and beyond to greater employment. Case management staff will be assigned to applicants to guide them through this process and then track outcomes.

The overarching goal is to stabilize the home and then provide an opportunity for greater individual success for household members. Assisting the adult in finding employment is only the first step if children are also part of the home. MDHS Case Managers must also look back and see how the children may be assisted. Providing resources for the child to be exposed to training, counseling, mentoring and tutoring will provide stability for current and future healthy choices.

Partners for Success in Workforce Development.

Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES). We have entered into a partnership with MDES so they may provide Job Readiness Assessments (JRA), Employment Development Plans (EDP), soft-skills training, resume building, etc. to all adults who apply for services at MDHS. The first steps were taken to implement this plan in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program which affects approximately 5,800 cases. The second step is currently under way to be implemented during this fiscal year will be the individuals in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which affects approximately 253,000 cases. This also includes ensuring each of the applicants are entered into the Mississippi Works system. Therefore, a request for assistance through MDHS is also a request for assistance to find employment. Prior to this agreement, MDHS and MDES were duplicating services with no single plan of action for the individual. The partnership with MDES also includes allowing them to co-locate in strategic MDHS offices for efficiency in services for those seeking assistance as well as the taxpayer who funds these programs.

Mississippi Board of Community and Junior Colleges (MBCJC). MDHS continues to build on the partnership with MBCJC to develop opportunities for training and education. The collaboration has grown significantly over the past six months and will continue to develop new opportunities for those we seek to serve. The MBCJC also is working closely with MDHS in our efforts with the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program. MBCJC has also partnered with MDHS to provide Child Care Provider training at no cost to the state.

Institutions for Higher Education (IHL). MDHS is working to partner with IHL to offer individuals an opportunity to complete their degree the Complete 2 Compete (C2C). There are a significant number of

adults who have multiple college credits but have not received a degree. This program will provide an additional resource for those seeking self-sufficiency.

Eight State Universities. MDHS has reached out to each of the eight state universities to establish Youth Development programs. There has been initial information that indicates as many as 40% of all athletes attending the state universities are already parents. Many of these are non-custodial parents. MDHS and the universities developed programs to assist these athletes and multiply the affect by letting them reach out to the youth in their communities. This may be the only exposure many of the youth will have to university campuses. We will also offer career technical training in an effort to guide the youth to future success.

Mississippi Community Education Center/Families First Resource Centers (FFRC). Dr. Nancy New in their capacity as leaders in the FFRCs have expanded their services to include counseling, mentoring, vocational training, career development, tutoring, forensic interviewing, fatherhood initiatives, Healthy Teens for a Better Mississippi, parenting classes, etc. These services are now offered in every county of the state. MDHS and FFRC will continue to offer services as appropriate based on the needs of each community and individual. The FFRCs will also be a valuable resource for the MDHS case management staff as they offer solutions to those who seek our services.

IMPROVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUALS

As part of the multi-generational approach, MDHS is committed to improving opportunities for individuals to make healthy self-sustaining decisions. The partnerships we have developed over the previous three years will continue to expand and become the base of operation. MDHS recognizes the need to maximize resources and multiply opportunities. With shrinking state funds, we must identify duplicated and overlapping services to eliminate. In doing so, we will identify public/private partnerships that will produce cost savings with added capacity and performance based outcomes. This will also ensure the elimination of Broad Based Categorical Eligibility and not waiving the ABAWD requirements will not adversely affect those we seek to serve.

The MDHS case management staff offer a guided approach through the complicated process of accessing resources. With your leadership, the agency partnered with the majority of other related agencies to produce the first approved Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan. This partnership provides for four Workforce Areas around the state where the participating agencies will be housed in one location for maximum service delivery.

The FFRCs will provide a valuable resource to identify ways to improve opportunities for individuals. In addition, organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, and Jobs for Mississippi Graduates are available for additional capacity building.

IMPROVE DEPARTMENT CAPACITY AND EFFICIENCY

MDHS has identified multiple opportunities to increase capacity and efficiency. Evaluating each of the 13 divisions within the agency has exposed cost allocation and matching deficiencies. MDHS will maximize federal funds while reducing state general funds.

There will be further analysis to determine how the agency will shed antiquated and inefficient policies and procedures. Every contract, sub-grant and MOU will be evaluated. In addition, further accountability will be implemented within the agency. An Internal Audit Department has been established to provide the necessary oversight of operations both administrative and programmatic. This too will provide opportunities for improvement and efficiencies.

Effective October 1, 2016, MDHS entered into a contract with Young Williams, a private nationally recognized Child Support organization based in Mississippi, to operate the MDHS local offices for child support. This action was taken as a result of reductions in the MDHS budgets, space needs for the recently created Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) and a desire to modernize the program. During the first several months, MDHS will transfer operations in a way that will maintain current operations with no changes. i.e. same offices, same processes, same employees, etc. With this action, all 82 county Child Support operations are managed by this private company.

During the Young Williams pilot program for 17 counties in Southwest Mississippi, it was proven successful both with results and with saving Mississippi tax dollars. MDHS estimates there will be a minimum of \$1 million in cost savings with the potential for \$2 million in State funds saved. The state-wide transition to Young Williams is complex as it involves over 250,000 cases. All MDHS Child Support staff were offered jobs at or above the MDHS pay rate, with similar benefits and retirement options. Young Williams has designed the transition to take place over a period of time to avoid disruption of services.

There is ongoing work to reorganize the agency to align more completely with your priorities. Specifically, a Workforce Development Unit within Field Operations has been created while eliminating the Division of Family Foundation and Support. This was accomplished by utilizing the FFRCs to provide the functionality previously administered by state employees. This model will be replicated across the agency .

IMPROVE SYSTEMS

The industry standard in human services across the nation is moving more toward an automated technology driven delivery system. Mississippi, and specifically MDHS, has lagged behind in this critical area for many years. The four legacy systems and three stand-alone systems within the agency lack efficiency and are tremendously expensive to maintain. However, they have proven to be workhorses that could provide more capacity with the proper updates. MDHS has worked for two years with the ITS procurement process and finally has the approval to move forward with the updates necessary to truly affect positive and lasting change. We have also created in-house referral systems that ensure the Generation Plus (gen+) approach remains viable.

The efficiency and cost savings realized from the updates currently being implemented, will provide the front-line county employees a greater resource for achieving the multi-generational goals identified above. The agency utilizes technology to further identify how best to allocate agency resources. This includes staff assignment.

ISSUES OF CONCERN IDENTIFIED IN PRIOR LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The issues that were identified in the prior legislative session were centered around the bill known as H.O.P.E. Act. The East Coast group, FGA, worked with the legislature during the last session to offer strategies to address their perceived “loopholes” in the Medicaid, SNAP and TANF programs. The major issues include:

Loopholes in Eligibility – FGA states the Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) option, which allows the resources of applicants to be disregarded, produces fraud and abuse. The state has begun the process effective July 1, 2019. Time-frame for policy re-writes and system re-design took approximately six to design and implement. Costs associated with this change has been minimal.

Start Checking Assets – With the elimination of BBCE we now are federally required to “check assets”. Mississippi is confident we can do this in a very effective and least invasive way possible. This requires cooperation and automation between state agencies, financial institutions, etc. The agreements with state agencies would not be difficult but, automation would be very expensive requiring an initial up-front investment of state funds. I would need to include this additional funds request in my 2018 budget with your approval. The estimated cost associated with this change would be approximately \$1.5 million conservatively.

Codify Work Requirements – The WIOA State Plan specifically addresses both TANF and SNAP caseloads in the Workforce Development initiative.

Improve Eligibility Verification and Monitoring – The current eligibility verification and monitoring process with SNAP and TANF is significant . We spend more than \$3 million per year to utilize all federal match opportunities. In addition, the MOU with MDES is intended to further the income verification process with minimal costs associated with this match.

Improve Identity Verification – The FGA report targets improved identity verification as a solution to identity fraud etc. in the Medicaid program. The SNAP federal regulations allow the state to pend eligibility verification for head of household but not for the other household members.

Share Data Across Agencies – MDHS has executed multiple MOUs with the specific agencies associated with the needs based programs we administer. The WIOA State Plan as well as the State Workforce Development Board have been driving forces in the data sharing project. NSPARC reports the new “hubs” for real time data sharing will be fully available July 2019.

Add Additional Programs to the National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC) - MDHS has lead the nation in developing the NAC with five states as part of the original consortium through a pilot program allowed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The national office recently announced they would allow an expansion of this project. The USDA is not offering additional funding but, Mississippi agreed to continue to lead this effort. The governance structure for the program is being developed with our federal partners and there are 22 states who have expressed interest in joining the project. Other programs, such as Medicaid, has definitely been a key factor in the design. This took approximately 12 months of onboarding associated with this process.

Law of 16

We have Identified the need for professional and personal development for both our staff and those we serve. The Law of 16 Development Program has been implemented agency wide and we are now working with other state agencies to train their staff. In addition, we have implemented this program to address the needs of those we serve. We see this as a way to eliminate one of the last barriers to finding true self sufficiency for those who seek to not be dependent on needs based programs. Empowering individuals and families is transformational in the field of Human Services and we are more than willing to be leaders in this area.

CHILDCARE FRAUD AND BIOMETRICS

The National Child Care Reauthorization Bill passed in 2015 with final rules received at the end of September 2016 imposes a multitude of changes on states. Many have called these changes unfunded

mandates. Working with partner agencies as well as the SECAC, MDHS submitted the Child Care State Plan which was conditionally approved. Our federal partners are allowed the state up to 18 months to develop a working plan to submit for approval followed by statewide implementation. Fraud prevention and a quality are two of the key components of the new requirements

SUMMARY AND MOVING FORWARD

The agency will continue to move forward to identify cost savings and efficiencies to ensure we are responsive to those seeking our services but, more importantly to the taxpayers of Mississippi. MDHS is rebranding the agency to move towards Workforce Development centered practice.

MDHS is up for the challenge. Restructuring human services to meet the ever evolving needs specific to Mississippi is worth the energy and effort. Please find enclosed a quick view of highlights from each of the program areas.

Respectfully,

John Davis, Executive Director

Mississippi Department of Human Services