

Minutes Thursday February 20, 2025

Commissioner Brubaker called the meeting to order by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with Commissioners Wehri and staff.

Elizabeth Miller with the Ohio Public Defenders office, Kenneth Sturgill with Allen County Public Defender regarding the northwest regional updates met with Commissioners Wehri and Brubaker. Kayla Prowant of the Probate office sat in for Judge Borer. The judge had court scheduled so could not join the meeting he did stop in and share some thoughts. Judge Borer is not opposed to the changes but he does have questions. The judge wants to make them aware of local attorney are getting paid substantial funds. It is becoming harder and harder to find counsel for the courtrooms. Some of these attorneys have taken on more public defending in surrounding counties. The new attorneys are not taking on courtroom cases. Elizabeth explained there is a shortage of attorneys to take on indigent cases. A map was shared showing the public defender offices in Ohio along with the private and not for profit offices that offer defense services. Can we create some efficiencies to help with the shortage of attorneys? Some counties wanted to get out of the business of public defense. Elizabeth explained a task Force that was created and made some recommendations to create the northwest Regional Hub. Commissioner Noonan from Allen Co proposed Allen County being the hub. The costs from the counties involved Allen, Hardin, and Putnam were reviewed. To create the hub in Allen to services the courts in Hardin and Putnam Counties. The Allen County office would become part of the Ohio Public Defenders office. Information from Allen, Putnam and Hardin was reviewed. The goal is to create a hub office for these counties to review cases not to take away appellate court services. The structuring of the hub office was reviewed. The next two years the counties would not lose anything this would be state funded. This is a pilot program that is stated funded. If it is not self-sustaining in two years the process would go back to the previous process. They do not want to take away the lively hood of the local attorneys. It is hoped that the attorneys would join. Putnam is the last county to be approached due to getting new Commissioners. This would transition from court-appointed attorneys to public defending. Elizabeth has met with the governor's office and it is hoped that this will work to take the reimbursement out of the system. The counties reimbursement rates for indigent defense have not had a lot of increases. In 2019 it rose to 75% currently it is 79%. The current reimbursement costs were used to create the cost estimates. There are less attorneys in practice due to retirement from COVID and the new graduates are not interested in low pay due to the high debt from college. The Ohio Public Defenders office does handle the reimbursement for all counties but they do not handle the processes for each county. This would not start until after the executive budget is approved in July. The goal is to be up and running by January of 2026. Once the approvals are received, they will come back and talk to the counties. A Memorandum of Understanding would be written up and approved by all county' involved. The efficiencies would have to be identified. On the reimbursement, it would still be the same process for the county but the Hub office would cover the expense for now. All the Judges have been contacted for feedback. Their similar concern is to not eliminate court appointed attorneys. This would not eliminate but would supplement the existing attorneys. The judge would make the decisions of which cases get awarded to public defending versus court appointed attorneys. Judge Niese was concerned about the timelines of his hearings needing an attorney within two days. The availability of the attorneys was a concern of the judges. There would be specific people dedicated to Putnam County. If the person for felony cases would be sick there would be someone else to take their place. The judge's concerns were reviewed. They will not be

handling child support cases. Juvenile court they would do anything that is not jailable. Traffic and delinquencies. The courts would be able to appoint the counsel. Block scheduling is preferred but the hub office will work with the courts for availability and coverage of cases. Putnam's Prosecutor uses Matrix are they compatible with that system, the hub program is similar but not the same. The goal is to have someone here every day. The Allen County office is fairly new and the attorneys were becoming fewer to pick from. The few attorneys that did participate were becoming spread too thin. With the public defender office, it has helped to keep things moving and keep people from sitting in jail longer than needed. Two-three more attorneys would be needed by the hub office to have a sufficient staff level for the counties in the regional area. Judges can recommend attorneys to apply to the hub office. The goal is to keep it local if possible. There are a lot of connections to Putnam County. If in two years the judges are not happy with the process Putnam County can opt out. This program is for two years and the county will be in for that time if the MOU is approved. After the two years the MOU could be renewed if they want to stay in also. The hub office would be 100% state funded for the two pilot years. The Commissioners want the judges to be fully on board with joining the hub since it affects them directly. The judges can meet with Ken and the Allen County Public Defender's office also since they were not available to attend today. The Commissioners can reach out to the state representatives to discuss any details. Contact information was exchanged.

There was no business agenda due to no items submitted in timeframe.

Commissioner Brubaker had a question for Ryan Moran regarding maintenance on Plum Creek. Ryan explained the history and maintenance on Plum Creek to Commissioners Wehri and Brubaker. There have been complaints that trees are growing up in the Columbus Grove Village section again. Ryan said he will go out and view the ditch and see what work needs to be done.

The minutes from Tuesday February 18, 2025 were reviewed and approved.

Joe Burkhart met with Commissioners Wehri and Brubaker to update them on IT security issues. He needs additional hours with PCS. He has some funds left from last year that would cover this expense. There may be more funding needed in the future if there are issues that come up. The leftover funds should be able to cover the needed expenses but there are always issues that come up. He has a new project under SOPHOS which covers our phishing. There is an offer for \$ 30,000 to renew the antivirus and another offer for \$29,050 to renew the antivirus for three years, scanning phishing emails and monitoring backups down from \$56,000. We would lose a year but we would have the new security going forward. It is not required but a big enhancement to our security. Joe explained the remote site for 911 at the Office of Public Safety and the equipment needed. Joe has a meeting scheduled next week to review this for the new EMS building addition. Joe is also looking at running fiber to the Office of Building Safety building from the O-G Road building. He is looking at the placement along the street, which side, for future plans. The ROI is about 7-8 years on that.

Mr. Wehri moved to adjourn for lunch.

Mr. Brubaker seconded the motion.

Vote: Wehri yes Brubaker yes Schlumbohm absent

Commissioners returned from lunch and mentioned they also stopped at the Office of Public Safety. Brian Hilvers gave them a facility tour of their building.

Cindy Landwehr informed the Commissioners of the Loss Control Incentive program through CORSA that provides opportunities for a discount on the county's liability insurance.

The Commissioners confirmed everything was in order for them to attend the new Commissioner training in Columbus next week.

Mr. Brubaker moved to adjourn for the day.

Mr. Wehri seconded the motion.

Vote Wehri yes Brubaker yes Schlumbohm absent

Mr. Brubaker moved to approve the minutes as read from Thursday, February 20, 2025.

Mr. Wehri seconded the motion.

Vote: Mr. Wehri yes Mr. Brubaker yes Mr. Schlumbohm absent