**Office of Ombudsperson for Families**

**OBFF Joint Meeting of Community-Specific Boards**

**Tuesday, May 20, 2025**

**4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**

This meeting was conducted [via WebEx video](https://minnesota.webex.com/minnesota/ldr.php?RCID=156cdaabfe6bf842af42cd6855eeed31)/audio

*Mission: To ensure that children and families are protected by law in all child placement proceedings conducted by public and private agencies.*

# Board Members Present:

African American Board: Gina Washington, Jean Webb-Bradford, Glenda D. Rooney

Asian Pacific Board: Thanh Glasco, Derek Kuns, Yi Li You

Spanish-Speaking Board: Jesús Villaseñor, Juan Linares, Sonia Davila Williams

# Board Members Absent:

African American Board: Ella Gross, Roger Clarke, Imogene Koehler

Asian Pacific Board: Brook Mallak

Spanish-Speaking Board: none

# Staff Present:

Muriel Gubasta, Ann Hill, Manuel Zuniga, Beth Chaplin, Katie Heilman, Rachel Lovejoy

# Guest Speakers:

Lola D. Adebara, Antonia Apolinário-Wilcoxin, Devon Gilchrist

# Call to Order

A Joint meeting of Community-Specific Boards was conducted via WebEx video/audio on May 20. The Meeting was convened at 4:38 pm by Gina Washington, board member of the African American Families Board.

# Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted and last meeting’s minutes were approved as quorum was reached. Jean Webb-Bradford moved to approve, and Sonia Davila Williams seconded. The motion was carried.

# Board Matters:

1. Introductions.
2. **Adoption of Agenda.**
3. **Lola D. Adebara, CEO and Founder, Partnerships for Permanence:** Adebara gave a presentation on the work of her nonprofit, Partnerships for Permanence, and the work it does with young people with lived experience in the child welfare system.
4. **Antonia Apolinário-Wilcoxin, PhD, Equity Strategies, LLC:** Apolinário-Wilcoxin presented on her work with the Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council (CECLC) and similar community-driven work groups with state and county agencies.
5. **Devon Gilchrist, African American Child and Family Wellbeing Unit Director, Department of Children, Youth, and Families:** Gilchrist presented on the work of the African American Child and Family Wellbeing Unit.
6. **Adjournment**
With no further discussion, Gina Washington, member of the meeting’s sponsoring advisory board, adjourned the meeting at 5:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Heilman

Int. Office Administrative Specialist, Office Manager

## Introduction and Adoption of Agenda

1. Gina Washington opened the meeting with introductions of all present.
2. Jean Webb-Bradford moved to approve the minutes from the last board meeting, and Sonia Davila Williams seconded the motion.

## Lola D. Adebara, CEO and Founder, Partnerships for Permanence

1. Partners for Permanence (P4P) is a nonprofit organization that Adebara started 13 years ago, working to improve child welfare system. P4P provides child welfare training to families and professionals, as well as leadership training and mentoring programs for young adults impacted by foster care, adoption, or juvenile justice.
	1. P4P also provides case management and mental health support groups, and a long-term support network for young people in the system transitioning into adulthood.
	2. The goal of the program is to highlight success stories of young leaders with lived experience.
2. Leaders Changing the System (LCS) Advisory Group: this group is made up of dedicated, passionate, “proximate leaders” with personal and professional experience in child welfare.
	1. There are also many collaborative partners, including the African American Babies Coalition and Projects, Metro State Social Work Department, Ramsey and Hennepin County Social Services, and Casey Family Programs.
	2. The Advisory Group works to improve and expand the annual LCS summit.
3. LCS Summit: this is a transformational gathering for youth and adult partners to develop a circle of support. This year’s summit is on August 7, 2025, in downtown St. Paul. The focus this year is on elevating the stories of professionals, parents, and young people, what they are providing in the space of child welfare. This summit builds a community of people who can serve as mentors, coaches, etc. [Learn more at the event website](https://www.partnershipsforpermanence.org/events/2025-lcs-summit) (<https://www.partnershipsforpermanence.org/events/2025-lcs-summit>).
	1. The summit works to improve outcomes for youth and adults with foster care and adoption lived experience by identifying limitations and challenges, discussing policy like the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPACWDA), reigniting purpose, restoring joy, and reimagining the child welfare system. There are panel discussions with those involved in the system.
	2. The goal is to create safe space for all to have courageous conversations.
	3. The fee is $50 per person, which includes meals. There are scholarships for all youth and foster/adoptive parents, as well as CEU certificates.
	4. Part of the summit involves presenting awards and recognition for champions in the work of child welfare.
4. Questions:
	1. Jean Webb-Bradford asked how many youth are involved in the program. There are currently 30 young people in the program from Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota, and Washington Counties. There is no age limit, so there are seasoned adults in the support network who help as mentors. In 2024 the LCS Summit had about 15 young people attend and an additional 5-6 who helped with planning. The organization spreads the word about the program through partnerships with schools and county/state agencies.
	2. Yolanda Lee asked what services the youth are most in need of. Adebara mentioned referrals and funding. Mentorship, mental health support, and case management navigation are also crucial. Housing access to foster youth has been delayed, and they are unsure when the wait list will open back up. The power of having solid adult mentors is crucial for young people in the foster care system.
		1. There is a referral form on the website. Staff and board members at P4p all have lived experience and can handle referrals appropriately.
5. Learn more at the Partnerships for Permanence website (<https://www.partnershipsforpermanence.org>), or email info@partnershipsforpermanence.org.

## Antonia Apolinário-Wilcoxin, PhD, Equity Strategies, LLC

1. Short video from HealthPartners about their Community Advisory Council: [watch online](https://youtu.be/Dk5hP3goeXg?si=WdSA7VtONSkqFoK0) (<https://youtu.be/Dk5hP3goeXg?si=WdSA7VtONSkqFoK0>)
	1. After the murder of George Floyd, people from the community reached out to Apolinário-Wilcoxin about creating a community advisory council. This council brings the voices of those experiencing health disparities forward. This is a difficult issue in the state of Minnesota right now.
	2. HealthPartners became certified as an equitable health plan.
2. Child welfare is a major concern identified by leadership. There is a need to go out into the community and ask how they discuss these health disparities in state agencies like the Department of Human Services (DHS). There needs to be input from the community to come up with policies – some people are being left behind.
3. Apolinário-Wilcoxin took classes to learn how to facilitate respectful meetings that provided opportunities for her colleagues at DHS to be more responsive:
	1. Leadership needed more diversity represented.
	2. There needed to be training about historical trauma and why some populations show up in high numbers.
	3. The community needs a stronger voice within DHS.
4. Apolinario-Wilcoxin brought these recommendations forward to the legislature, which lead to the creation of the [Cultural and Ethnic Community Leadership Council (CECLC)](https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/advisory-councils-task-forces/cultural-ethnic-communities-council.jsp). (<https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/advisory-councils-task-forces/cultural-ethnic-communities-council.jsp>)
	1. The community liked the name as a leadership group instead of an advisory council. Legislators added additional language in the law requiring DHS to produce a report to inform the health and human services committees and their housing situation.
	2. The agency has an equity policy. Community members who joined the council trained with Dr. Samuel Myers at the Roy Wilkins Center to understand policy making and how policy is written. This allows them to ask helpful questions to commissioners and make good recommendations to the legislature.
5. Apolinário-Wilcoxin is now working with a state agency to create a community advisory group. They want feedback on one of their programs, so they formed core team to create a mission statement, a vision statement, and then move on to an action plan to recruit members and so forth. This process is still in development.
6. Apolinário-Wilcoxin is happy to work with members of the board who wish to become involved: email antonia@equitystrategies.org or call 952-200-5334.

## Devon Gilchrist, African American Child and Family Wellbeing Unit Director, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

1. High level overview of the African American Child and Family Wellbeing Unit (AACFWBU).
	1. The unit has been working for the last five years to build capacity. It started in 2020 and has continued to add staff.
	2. The MAAFPACWDA allowed the unit to expand its reach. It was funded through federal and general dollars until 2025, with end of federal funding. However, the unit was codified into Statute 260.292 to allow it to continue.
	3. AACFWBU provides training for cultural competency for African American communities, technical assistance, on site assistance, case consultation, county act implementation, and monitors trends in counties and states. It administers the process for finding preservation and primary support grants for adequate families. It works with DHS, the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage (CMAH), and other state and county agencies.
	4. AACFWBU also conducts targeted case reviews, looking at cases at random from Hennepin and Ramsey Counties to see efforts to engage relatives in child placement. The unit will use that data to guide work, such as creating training practice guides.
	5. The unit provides reports of its activities to the advisory council.
	6. The unit works across other DCYF units, such as Safety and Prevention, Foster Care, and Permanency for research and training. This is because AACFWBU relates to several different areas involved with children, youth, and families.
2. AACFWUB has added 11 positions total: Gilchrist is the supervisor. Other positions include staff working on policy, staff working on targeted case reviews, a staff member who handles complaints, a grants manager, and staff in the safety and prevention space who work to get out in front to make sure families have the services they need.
	1. Examples of current projects include working around family first legislation, a statewide parenting model to potentially bring forward in Minnesota, and community engagement activities.
	2. AACFWUB has a robust staff with professional experience, and some have lived experience in child welfare – it is important to have that representation, as well as representation from the neighborhoods most affected by child welfare disparities.
	3. The advisory council and community members were involved in hiring process.
3. Most of the work in the last year has related to implementation of MAAFPACWDA.
4. The advisory council was created in 2022 – Gilchrist studied CECLC’s work and reached out for guidance on what worked and what didn’t. Members of the council have a diverse array of professional and lived experience. The council has been meeting for about 2 years. The council will provide feedback and give reports to give to the legislation about their duties.
	1. The first report to the legislature will be January 1, 2026.
5. Gilchrist will send the slide deck presentation to Katie to send to the board with the meeting minutes.
6. Questions:
	1. Jean Webb-Bradford asked about a presentation to community. It is a work in progress to make sure it is done in a way that makes sense for the communities. The unit just hired someone who will coordinate the process of data standardization, creating public-facing dashboards to make it more accessible. If you want to be involved, please reach out to Gilchrist, especially for ideas on how to share the data. Gilchrist is seeing clear improvements for placement rates and other items. The goal is to look for data trends to see what might be working and how to share those processes with other counties/agencies.
7. The AACFWUB website is in progress. It will be informative, hopefully different from other state websites in how it presents data.

## The meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.