**Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund Commission**

**Open Minutes**

**October 11, 2023**

The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson J. Prontnicki at 9:30 a.m.

J. Prontnicki announced that in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act, the specifics as to time and place of this meeting were sent to the Office of the Secretary of State and the Department of Personnel for filing and posted on the official bulletin boards provided by those offices for notice of public meetings. Also, notices were prepared for two newspapers to inform the public of this meeting.

J. Prontnicki conducted a roll call of members as follows:

**Present:**

Janice Prontnicki, Chairperson

Phyllis Shanley Hansell, Vice Chairperson

Jeffrey Carrick

Dawn Mergen

Adam Neary (for Lisa Asare from 10 to 11 a.m.)

Manuel Paulino

Anthony Valenzuela

Carl Underland

Howard Weinberg

**Absent:**

Lisa Asare

Ralph Condo

**Guest:**

Caroline Gargione, DAG

**Staff:**

Christian Heiss, Executive Director

LorieAnn Wilkerson-Leconte, Deputy Executive Director

Amy Taklif, Senior Analyst

Janet Valentin-Forte, Secretary to the Commission

**Adoption of Agenda:**

P. Shanley Hansell made a motion to approve the proposed meeting agenda for the October 11, 2023 meeting. A. Valenzuela seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Public Comments:**

None.

**Approval of Minutes of August 2023 Meeting:**

P. Shanley Hansell made a motion to approve the open meeting minutes of the August 9, 2023 meeting. H. Weinberg seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

C. Underland made a motion to approve the closed meeting minutes of the August 9, 2023 meeting. P. Shanley Hansell seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Treasurer’s Report:**

C. Heiss reported that the Commission will review 27 applications during this meeting, including 19 eligibles, 4 ineligibles, 1 appeal, and 3 reconsiderations, with potential payments totaling $586,499.09. The projected fund balance is $19,630,000, sufficient to cover the payments for expenses in the applications under consideration. Counting the potential payments from this meeting, the Fund will have $6,889,816.54 remaining for grants to families and $2,291,393.29 for State Office operations for the remainder of State Fiscal Year 2024.

As of October 3, 2023, the State Office has received 77 applications in this fiscal year, and is currently processing 109 applications. C. Heiss noted that one application has been open since July 3, 2022; this application was submitted in quick succession with two others from a family.

**Executive Director’s Report:**

C. Heiss provided an update about the Application Portal Upgrade Project. PruTech is working with our office and the state Office of Information Technology to establish user verification protocols with MyNewJersey. A screening tool is being developed to allow families to better understand the program and assess their potential eligibility prior to initiating an application. The Department of Human Services is upgrading their internal IT systems to facilitate the new application portal, around mid-November.

Additionally, C. Heiss stated that on September 20,2023, the state office released a mini-bid request for proposals, to upgrade the current Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to a cloud version of CRM, which work better and help with concerns around IT security for our systems.

C. Heiss and L. Wilkerson-Leconte met with the Director and staff of the Office for New Americans at the Department of Human Services, to discuss strategies for increasing access to the Fund among new American immigrants in the state.

C. Heiss and L. Wilkerson-Leconte met with Noam Levey, senior correspondent at KFF Health News, to provide information about the Fund as an existing medical debt relief organization.

L. Wilkerson-Leconte highlighted that another Fund recipient has become a volunteer Parent Advisor with the Family Advisory Committee, after being inspired at the Family Appreciation Day. Currently, there are four volunteer Parent Advisors conducting outreach in faith-based, community, and healthcare settings, as well as on social media platforms.

L. Wilkerson-Leconte stated that two winter media outreach events are being planned, one in Trenton (December 6, 2023) and one in the southern region (potentially at Rowan University on December 8th or 14th). H. Weinberg offered to attend the southern event.

The State Office will contact Governor Murphy’s Chief of Staff, as well as the new Lieutenant Governor’s Chief of Staff, to request their participation in the Trenton event.

In response to J. Prontnicki’ s question about the logistics for the Commission meeting and event December 6th. L. Wilkerson-Leconte recommended to hold a hybrid meeting during the regular meeting time slot, and host an afternoon event, in order to take advantage of the state house or possibly another venue in Trenton.

**Closed Session:**

At 9:49 a.m., J. Prontnicki made a motion to go into closed session to review applications, which was seconded by J. Carrick. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Review of Applications:**

**Appeal:**

P. Shanley Hansell made a motion to uphold the Commission’s calculation of reasonable rate for appealed application #232402022 and to further waive family responsibility. H. Weinberg seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Eligibles:**

P. Shanley Hansell made a motion to approve the eligible applications as presented. J. Carrick seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Reconsiderations:**

P. Shanley-Hansell made a motion to accept the reconsidered applications as presented.

A. Valenzuela seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Ineligibles:**

P. Shanley-Hansell made a motion to accept the ineligible applications as presented.

D. Mergen seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor.

**Unfinished Business:**

C. Heiss reviewed a memo describing potential changes to the Fund’s application of family responsibility. P. Shanley-Hansell made a motion to update the family responsibility policy and regulations, waiving the fee for families with incomes less than 600 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and implementing a sliding fee schedule to the full family responsibility amount at 1000 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. H. Weinberg seconded the motion. All Commission members voted in favor. NOTE: Based on the discussion in the Closed Session, these updated family responsibility rules were applied to the applications considered in this meeting.

The Commission directed the Executive Director to move forward with drafting proposed regulatory language to change caps for van modifications, home modifications, speech language and hearing services, and applied behavior analysis, prioritizing updates to the home modification and applied behavior analysis caps.

**New Business:**

C. Heiss stated that the State Office received a letter from the state auditor asking for updates on any changes related to the recommendations included in the audit report of September 8, 2022. He noted that the State Office will draft a response letter for review by Commission leadership which will also be shared with the DHS Commissioner.

P. Shanley Hansell made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by D. Mergen. All Commission members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 11:57 a.m.