



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Monday, October 13, 2025, at 3:00 pm
6302 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Suite 100
Tampa, FL 33619

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Facilitator: Aakash Patel, Chair

Board Members Present:

Dr. Larissa Baia, Dr. Daira Barakat, Gino Casanova, Wynton Geary, Dr. Emily Shaffer Hudkins, Keidrian Kunkel, Commissioner Gwendolyn Myers, Beth Pasek, Aakash Patel, Noelle Wostal, Dr. Shawn Robinson, and Felicia Thomas

Board Members Absent:

Rebecca Bacon, Tracye Brown, Cameron Cassedy, Annette Eberhart, Kelly Flannery, Jonathan Ferro, Adam Giery, Bob Hyde, Amanda Jae, Dr. Jacquelyn Jenkins, Brian Mays, Chantal Porte, and Alina Shaffer,

ELCHC Staff:

Dr. Fred Hicks, Nancy Will, Gary Meyer, Abigail Perez, and Kelley Minney

Other Attendees:

Attorney Paul Quin, and Alex Ochoa

CALL TO ORDER

Quorum Verification

Quorum was not established.

Chair Patel asked Dr. Emily Shaffer Hudkins introduce herself to the board of directors. Dr. Shaffer Hudkins, Child Developmental Psychologist at the University of South Florida shared part C laws for special education is a passion of hers which helps families from birth to age three to receive the support needed.

Chair Patel asked that all board members present introduce themselves to the newest Board Member Dr. Emily Shaffer Hudkins.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Patel asked Gino Casanova to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

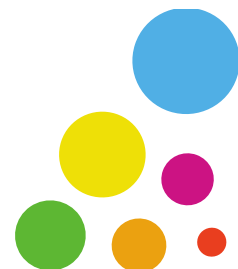
PUBLIC COMMENT I

No, public comment I.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mission Moment

Chair Patel asked board members to share their impressions of the Children's Summit held at the Motor Enclave on Thursday, September 18.



There was board discussion on the event space being wonderful including the lunch selection, the speaker and all those who participated in the program of the Summit.

There was board discussion on a few improvements/recommendations for next year's Children's Summit including more guidance to find the location, and audio issues for tables set to the side of the stage.

Dr. Robinson shared that a committee meeting would be held to discuss the opportunities and recognized the work of everyone involved in making the Summit a success for a third year in a row.

Dr. Robinson, Chair of the Development & Outreach committee, shared an update with the board that the Summit raised \$110,000 through sponsorships, ticket sales, and onsite donations, with net proceeds at \$49,000, the remainder raised went to cover the cost of the event. Dr. Robinson shared that the distribution of the proceeds had yet to be finalized. Dr. Robinson shared there were 33 sponsors, and the ELCHC is still waiting for 2 to contribute what was pledged. Dr. Robinson also shared that for sponsors that were unable to attend the video presentation of Dr. Dan Wuori would be sent out by Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County (ELCHC) staff.

Chair Patel that he was interviewed by Bay News for a show called "In Focus," which is a Sunday morning show, and he shared the success of the Children's Summit and what the legislators can do to advocate more strongly for early education.

Chair Patel shared that part of being out in the community on public platforms and in social media spaces is to share the mission and vision of the ELCHC with the hope to bring in partnerships from the community and awareness of the services provided. Chair Patel also shared with the board that the Tampa Bay Lightning season opener under new ownership occurred on Thursday, October 9, 2025. Chair Patel shared he was at the game with his clients, and the ELCHC was chosen to receive a check for \$50,000 from the Lighting Foundation, which is great news.

Kelley Minney, Manager of Donor Relations, shared the ELCHC was to receive \$35,000 with the remaining \$15,000 going to the Hillsborough Education Foundation.

Abigail Perez, Director of Impact and Community Relations, explained to the board of directors that the *Community Hero* chosen by the Lightning Foundation directs where the \$50,000 goes to and that the ELCHC was chosen to receive \$35,000, not the full \$50,000 of the donation.

Chair Patel shared that as the ELCHC Board of Directors there is fiduciary responsibility for the money that comes in, and any community outreach and the only other job of the board is to hire and fire the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Chair Patel shared that he attended the game with some clients who were watching the Community Hero presentation and was disappointed to not see Dr. Hicks at the game or in the video.

Chair Patel asked Dr. Hicks to share his thoughts for the Children's Summit before addressing the receiving of the funds through the Tampa Bay Lightning Foundation.

Dr. Hicks shared that his vision from the start of his onboarding was to have a two-day Summit to include providers, teachers and families.

Dr. Hicks shared that it is important to continue to elevate the Summit as a means to bring in community business partners and to spread the need for and importance of early education.

Dr. Hicks shared that dependency numbers from the families that visit the ELCHC is growing weekly and the reliance of the greater community on ELCHC services is extremely important.

Dr. Hicks shared that he was not made aware in advance of the content of the video that was projected at the Tampa Bay Lightning season opener. Dr. Hicks stated that the optics of the video made it seem as if the former CEO was the current CEO. Dr. Hicks shared that he has been receiving phone calls and texts asking if he was still CEO of ELCHC. Dr. Hicks stated the optics were confusing and moving forward a situation like this cannot happen again.

Commissioner Myers shared that she was also in attendance at the Lightning season opener and was also shocked to see the video as presented. Commissioner Myers shared that this situation was an internal one and someone on ELCHC staff must have known as if the video looked to be done at Glazier Children's Museum.

Dr. Hicks stated that the video was staged at the Glazier's Children's Museum to include several children and the former CEO of the ELCHC.

Commissioner Myers stated someone had to apply for the award and should have made Dr. Hicks aware of the award and the process.

Dr. Hicks stated that there needs to be an investigation to ensure that the ELCHC did not misrepresent themselves to the Lightning Foundation, which could negatively impact ELCHC.

Chair Patel shared that six ELCHC staff were at the game next to the former CEO and that approval must have come from staff as Dr. Hicks was not made aware of the significance of the award and the date of the hockey game.

Commissioner Myers shared that the staff that were responsible had advance knowledge of the Lightning game and accompanying video presentation to the former CEO at the Lightning Season opener should not continue to be employed at the ELCHC. Commissioner Myers stated that there would be no tolerance of this type of action by ELCHC staff if this type of situation were to happen towards any member of the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

Dr. Hicks shared that the outcome of the internal investigation would be shared at the next board meeting.

Dr. Shawn Robinson stated that the next scheduled meeting of the ELCHC Board of Directors is scheduled for February 2026.

The board asked for a special meeting of the board of directors as soon as there was a conclusion of the internal investigation.

Dr. Larissa Baia asked for clarification as to how much Dr. Hicks knew of the award.

Dr. Hicks explained that he signed off on a form regarding proceeds that would come from receiving the award.

Dr. Baia asked for continued clarification by asking Dr. Hicks if he was made aware of the creation of the video or if he was made aware of the ceremony that would accompany the award from the Lightning Foundation.

Dr. Hicks stated he was not made aware of the creation of the video that was shown at the game nor was he aware of the former CEO's participation in the video.

Chair Patel asked that a process be put into place so that in the event moving forward Dr. Hicks is unavailable to receive an award there is designated representative. Chair Patel stated that the conversation today is why Dr. Hicks was not made aware of the game.

Gino Casanova asked if Dr. Hicks was made aware of the date the award would be received.

Dr. Hicks stated he was not made aware.

Chair Patel shared with the board that the nominated charities know a few days ahead of time at to which game to attend because the award would be given out however, no one knows the actual "Community Hero" is so that there is an element of surprise. Chair Patel stated that he knows the details of the process because he has been involved in the process previously.

Beth Pasek asked if the former CEO and the name of the ELCHC were connected in the video.

Chair Patel replied yes.

Keidra Kunkel shared that in her organization there are two employees who share the duties of a Chief of Staff and perhaps this same structure could be used at ELCHC moving forward.

Gino Casanova asked for clarification about how the former CEO could accept the award on behalf of the ELCHC as if he was still currently the CEO.

Chair Patel explained that the ELCHC staff nominated the former CEO. Chair Patel explained some of the content of the narration of the video saying "the name and vision behind the ELCHC," is the former CEO."

There was board discussion on the six ELCHC staff members that were at the game sitting with the former CEO and many board members interjecting to the degree of inappropriateness of their actions.

Chair Patel asked that Dr. Hicks have the investigation completed as soon as possible.

Commissioner Myers asked that the investigation and the outcome for the ELCHC staff involved take no more than 30 days.

It was determined that Dr. Hicks should provide an update to board of directors on Friday, October 17 that would include information from the Lighting Foundation.

Dr. Hicks also shared that after Friday there would be information with an update call for the entire board of directors by means of a special meeting of the board.

Paul Quin shared that the ELCHC was at the mercy of the people who would be providing the documentation.

Chair Patel stated that the investigation of the staff should come first.

Keidra Kunkel asked the board of directors to consider not having the in-person option for board meetings.

Chair Patel responded that this would be a discussion topic at the retreat on November 1st.

CONSENT AGENDA

The following items were included under the Consent Agenda:

Approval of the October 13, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting Agenda

Approval of the August 18, 2025, Annual Board of Directors Draft Meeting Minutes

No vote could be taken to approve the Consent Agenda as quorum was not established.

LEGAL REPORT

Paul Quin, ELCHC Board attorney, shared that 17 out of 25 board members filled out the evaluation. Mr. Quin shared that the ratings were on a scale with a maximum of 3.0 with 2.82 as the average score. Mr. Quin stated that the evaluations would be forwarded to the state as the next step in the process.

ACTION ITEMS

No vote could be taken to approve the action item on the agenda as quorum was not established.

DISCUSSION

None.

Committee Reports

Dr. Robinson reported on the Development & Outreach Committee earlier in the meeting.

Gino Casanova reported that the Legislative Committee had a virtual meeting scheduled for Thursday, October 16 at 3:00.

CEO REPORT

Dr. Hicks reported the difficulties with Department of Children and Families (DCF) taking over classroom observations. Dr. Hicks shared that providers are facing challenges with more violations than usual. Dr. Hicks said he is attempting to get a meeting with DCF and providers.

Retreat

Dr. Hicks stated that Bob Hyde would be asked to facilitate this year's retreat.

Waitlist

Dr. Hicks shared that due to financial shortfall this fiscal year a waitlist of 3,500 children has been created. Dr. Hicks reviewed the list of requirements for families to receive the services the ELCHC provides.

Children's Summit 2026

Dr. Hicks shared that his vision for next year's Summit should include parents, providers, teachers and all those involved in education, the young learners in the community.

Dr. Hicks shared that he would like to partner with community partners and ELCHC Board of Directors provide representatives to head this second day of the Children's Summit.

Commissioner Myers suggested that this second day as described by Dr. Hicks should start at 9:00 am on the Saturday after the traditional Children's Summit.

Felicia Thomas shared a similar event that her organization runs and provided some ideas to Dr. Hicks and the board.

SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Day of Play is scheduled for December 6 from 10:00 am -12:00 noon at Jackson Springs Park & Community Center in Tampa.

The next ELCHC Board of Directors Regular meeting is scheduled for February 23, 2026, at 3:00 pm which has been changed from February 16, due to Children's Week 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENT II

There was no Public Comment II.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 4:15.

Read and approved by: Robert Hyde 21/07/2026

Bob Hyde, ELCHC Board of Directors Secretary *Date*

Signature: Robert Hyde
Robert Hyde (Jul 21, 2026 13:25:43 EDT)

Email: robert.hyde@suncoastcreditunion.com

10.13.2025 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes_Aproved

Final Audit Report

2026-07-21

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