

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

**HENDERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

MEETING DATE: July 17, 2013

SUBJECT: Social Services' Informational Update

PRESENTER: Gary Cyphers, Member, DSS Board

ATTACHMENTS: Yes

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

The DSS Board is providing monthly three-minute informational updates to the Board of Commissioners regarding various Social Services issues. The July 2013 update, provided by DSS Board Member Gary Cyphers, pertains to the recruitment process for the new DSS Director and an overview of the duties/responsibilities of the Director and department.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

No Board action requested. This item is for information only.

Suggested Motion:

No motion suggested.

The Henderson County Board of Social Services (DSS) is well along in the process of selecting a new director for the county's Social Services Department.

"There are big shoes to fill," says Board President Lee Luebbe, referring to the present director, Liston Smith, who recently announced his retirement effective August 1, after twenty-five years on the job.

"Liston was dedicated to improving our ability to protect neglected or abused children and disabled adults and we are proud of the high standards he has achieved. He was always willing to collaborate with other community organizations for the greater good. We will be looking for someone who shares Liston's commitment and who can provide strong leadership in an environment of shrinking public support and increased technological demands."

DSS is converting to electronic registration and eligibility certification for public benefits, and the implementation of the Affordable Care Act will require DSS to incorporate applications for health insurance subsidies into its system, Luebbe explained.

The Director of Social Services is responsible for a department of 180 employees and a budget of \$18 million. The federal government provides 48% of the funds, the state share is 12% and Henderson County support amounts to 40%. While the director is hired and evaluated by the Board of Social Services, Social Services is a department of county government and the director is a part of the county leadership team. The director's budget must be approved by both the Social Services Board and the County Commissioners.

"Not only will the new director need thorough knowledge of social welfare policy and practice and considerable public administration experience and management skills, strong personal relationship and negotiating skills are required," says board member Gary Cyphers, Chairman of the Search Committee.

The Department of Social Services administers 46 federal, state and county programs, most of them mandated by law. Children's services include child abuse and neglect investigations, in-home family support services for families at risk of abuse or neglect, protective custody, foster care, social casework for children in custody, enforcement of child support, and administering subsidies for child care. At any given time, the DSS director is the legal custodian for about 100 children who were determined to be abused or neglected by a judge in the Henderson County Court.

DSS also provides protective services and social work support for vulnerable, exploited, abused or neglected older adults and people with disabilities. It administers the state program of aid for the blind and supervises adult care homes.

Among the financial aid and medical assistance programs DSS is responsible for are the Food and Nutrition Program (food stamps), screening and eligibility determination for the public insurance programs Medicaid and Health Choice as well as Work First employment support. DSS has contracts with 29 other agencies that assist in providing services.

The board conducted a national search for a new director.

"This recruitment process is fairly complex," says Cyphers. "We are working with the county human resources department to ensure compliance with county protocol but we must also submit the applications of candidates we wish to interview to the state social services department for approval prior to scheduling interviews. We will be interviewing candidates beginning in mid July, and we hope to have a new director by the end of August."

The board is committed to filling the position as soon as possible. "We are sensitive to the fact that DSS employees have difficult and stressful jobs, particularly those who work in emotionally volatile situations," Cyphers added. "Maintaining a supportive work environment for staff is a key leadership role. We don't want a longer period of uncertainty about the new leadership than necessary and we certainly don't want it to affect the people who rely on us for help."

Other board members on the search committee are Lee Luebbe, Don Cooper, Melinda Lowrance and Sharon Tirrell.