

**MEDINA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING
TUESDAY, AUGUST 10, 2004**

Sharon Ray began the discussion session at 9:30 a.m. with Patricia G. Geissman and Stephen D. Hambley present. The purpose of the special meeting was to discuss the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services' (ODJFS) budget deficit with Mead Wilkins, Director of Medina County Job & Family Services who just returned from meetings with ODJFS. The problem was caused by incorrectly entered program codes that made it appear more money was available for social outreach programs than there really was. He said there now appears to be no money in the budget to pay for food stamps and Medicaid administration unless it is taken from somewhere else for the period of January 1 to June 30th of FY '05 statewide.

Mead said that there are four different time frames that have to be dealt with, but it really all boils down to trying to figure out what is going to happen in state fiscal year '05. His department's goal for FY '05 was to get under the consolidated allocation amount, which they were barely able to do. That may not be sufficient now because when they consolidated, they assumed they could take all the TANF money and put it towards food stamps and Medicaid administration. That clearly cannot be done now. The question is where that gap is going to be filled. When they drafted the FY '05 budget, they expected \$1.35 million to be available to them that is not going to be available. Their goal was to trim the budget to come up with the \$1.35 million, but that will not even be sufficient to remedy the problem. There are still not funds statewide to administer to the programs for the full 12-month period.

Mr. Hambley said, therefore, the problem for 2005 is the \$1.35 million shortage plus the gap between January 1st to June 30th.

Mead agreed and said they could deal with the \$1.35 million shortage because they have some level of control over that and can make the appropriate changes. They do not know what is going on with the food stamps and Medicaid at the state level.

Mead said the other period of time is 2001, 2002, and 2003, which Tom Hayes, state agency Director, said the shortage would be picked up internally through the department. He said it would not be a county payback threat. They are going to go back and ask for forgiveness from the federal government for 2004. They are not sure what the reaction will be to the request or what the amount absolved would be if it were granted.

Mr. Hambley asked if there was any history of forgiveness of other states.

Mead said Ohio has been forgiven before, and Mrs. Geissman added that there is a strong possibility that they would be forgiven now.

Mr. Hambley asked how it would impact the county if they could not get the shortage forgiven.

Mead said there is potentially money in '04 that that could be rolled to '05 for food stamps and Medicaid administrative services. If they do not get forgiveness, the state might have to go to the General Assembly or something like that to fill it up.

Mr. Hambley said if there is no forgiveness, they would not be coming back to the county to pay it back, and Mead said that is a correct statement as it stands right now. Mead summed it up by saying they can put '00, '01, '02, '03, and '04 behind them, and they cannot really deal with '06 and '07 because it is too far into the future. They can just focus on FY '05.

Ms. Ray asked Mead where they go from here, and he said their goal will be to try to get through FY '05 and not have services or programs interrupted and not having to layoff staff. That would be a successful reaction to this level of problem.

Mr. Hambley said they still have not addressed the gap between January 1st and June 30th. He asked what that gap is in terms of dollars for the administrative costs.

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Mead said he guesses at \$300,000 to \$500,000. It is a substantial amount. He might know tomorrow after the "regrouping" meeting. He can look and see how they coded those salaries. He added that there are a lot of other counties much worse off than Medina County's JFS and they would not be in the forefront of collapse. They are in good financial shape and they have a really good staff.

Ms. Ray asked if the state was telling the counties to go back and work on their budgets and prepare for daily updates as to what the available money will be.

Mead said there is no clear answer to them at this point. He is on the committee that is working on the situation and he finds out information before other counties do.

Mrs. Geissman asked Mead if they determined who should be at the table to resolve this issue, and Mead said it would be high-level political people. She commented that she hopes they can avoid pointing fingers and just simply resolve the problem.

Ms. Ray said she certainly hopes they learned from their past as well. This is an inexcusable mistake that is somebody's fault. When you are dealing with taxpayer funds and government monies, a laissez faire attitude is not acceptable.

Mead said the state was too generous in a sense, and the programs were too successful. Ohio has one of the most successful welfare reform programs, if not the most successful programs in the country. It is a model for the rest of the country for true welfare reform of the system successfully.

Ms. Ray said that is why it is so important that they carry on. If they cut childcare or lower the levels, they are going to kick people back down the ladder again before they can wean themselves off assistance.

Mr. Hambley asked Mead about the status of the Lodi Resource Center and the 30-day notice of closing they gave.

Mead said he spoke with Dr. Vince DeGeorge, Director of the Family First Council that helped fund the project. They had been in the process of interviewing to replace intake and receptionist positions so there is no staff to run the programs at this point. Also, Commissioner Geissman searched very hard for money when they were in the financial crisis one to two years ago. There are not grants available to supplant existing programs.

Mr. Hambley asked why the programs were not cut off rather than extending them another year.

Mead said they continued them because they had the TANF incentives.

Mr. Hambley said Colene Rice had hopes that they would find some grants, and she was out researching grant opportunities.

Mead said one of the things they had been able to do a couple of times in the last seven years was to increase the client base when they had additional funds. They felt there was value in helping more people for as long as they could. That is why they kept the center open even though they knew the money would not be there at the end of the year. He said that Dr. Vince DeGeorge is very good at getting grants, and if he was not able to get any, they were not readily available.

Mrs. Geissman said that Mr. Hambley would be pleased to know that all of the programs will remain in Lodi. The hospital is picking up several of them. The thing that concerned her most was the Teen Café and as it turns out, the Oaks will be hosting another site in Lodi. It may not be able to serve as many teens though because it was a church location so she gave Betty Barlow another idea as to another location that might be better.

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Chris Jakab asked about the plan to reduce program costs by \$1.35 million. He asked if JFS would be lowering the eligibility requirement and if there would be a resolution forthcoming.

Mead said he would be bringing a resolution on Monday. Upon questioning he said they would be lowering the eligibility for daycare to 150% of the poverty level and it was 200%. The next step is to drop that down to 135%, which is the food stamp level, and that is incredibly low.

Ms. Ray said, from her perception of being a single parent, people will work for the health insurance, but will not work if their children are not taken care of. She wonders if he can appeal to state.

Mead said they would take the reductions in calculated steps to be responsible to both the county General Fund and to protect the client base.

Mr. Hambley said they still have to determine how to address the gap between January 1st and June 30th.

Mead said they do not have that ability to solve that problem. The ideal thing that they talked about at the state conference would be to assume the waiver concept. It is the same population with the same purpose and they would get waiver - if they were allowed to have their own state consolidated fund. They could use those monies to provide services to that population in whatever program they get in. The other thing that is happening is that TANF is a five-year program and they have had two two-year extensions. They are hoping that after the November election, Congress will seriously deal with the reauthorization of TANF and welfare reform. Unfortunately they are now becoming more punitive than supportive so there is always that political tension back and forth. Sometime after the election there will be a federal TANF reauthorization bill that may change some aspects of what they are doing. Part of that budget is based on some level of attrition that has yet to materialize.

Mr. Hambley said they do have a hiring freeze so vacant positions will not be filled.

Mead said they have to staff the front desk and answer the phones. Those people are the newest employees. If one of those people left, they might have to move an employee down to do those types of mandatory services.

Ms. Ray asked when the union contract for the JFS would be reopening or discussed.

Mead said it would be reopened in September or October of this year.

Ms. Ray asked about educational reimbursements that the county pays for.

Mead said they have stopped any new applications. Everybody that they are hiring now has at least an Associates Degree; therefore, they do not qualify for educational reimbursement. There is also staff that does not care to take advantage of the benefit. There is a group of five people that were hired ten to 12 years ago that did not have Associates Degrees. They are just finishing up these next two quarters to get as far as they can. JFS requires degrees to be a supervisor. They were not qualified to take the leadership position that they needed to take within the agency. They are continuing the education reimbursement this and next semester for the staff members that are already enrolled. That will be the end of the program.

Ms. Ray said that benefit is something that needs to be put on the table. When they are talking about cutting benefits and closing the gap between January 1st and June 30th they are going to have to put everything on the table and everything is going to have to be negotiated. As much as she would like to see education reimbursement continue, she does not feel it is the county's obligation to pay for it if they are in the middle of a fiscal crisis.

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Mr. Hambley asked what the original source was for those funds, and Chris said it is TANF incentives. There was some flexibility as to what those were used for.

Upon questioning, Chris said the amount of money involved is about \$10,000 per semester. The policy says the benefit is subject to availability.

There was a short discussion about the employees involved and the degrees they were pursuing and why. Because the financial picture is not very strong at this time, the Commissioners decided to table the discussion and take a closer look at it. They realize that registrations are due, plans have been made, and employees expected to be reimbursed, so the Commissioners will take that all into consideration.

Chris explained that since it is a reimbursement program, the Commissioners would approve the training application to reimburse for the successful completion of the course work at that point in December or January. He has no idea who has paid their tuition or not.

Mr. Hambley said he does not want to stick an employee with an anticipated cost because they have been offering the benefit all along. If they are in the middle of a program, the fees are due now.

Mead asked how they wanted to handle the situation. He asked if the employee paid for their tuition already if they would be reimbursed, and if they did not, they would not be reimbursed.

Ms. Ray said it needs to be consistent for all so they either do it this semester or not, or just this semester and not next semester.

Mr. Hambley said at this point in time, they are most likely not going to do it next semester.

Mrs. Geissman said she would be interested to see if people have sent their application to Mead for approval and have not done anything yet. If they have not done anything, then she feels they should stop it now.

Ms. Ray pointed out that some people apply early and some wait until the last minute.

Mead said his employees realize that they need a resolution for reimbursement to occur.

Chris informed the Commissioners that an offer has been made for the lead attorney position for the Public Defenders Office. As soon as he finds out if the offer is accepted, he will let them know and give them copies of the resume. The Public Defender Commission is trying to get this person onboard by Labor Day to allow them to hire staff. He heard they want to start in Wadsworth Municipal Court and then transition to Medina Municipal Court and not bring full staff on until then.

There was no further discussion. The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

MEDINA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

Sharon A. Ray

Patricia G. Geissman

Stephen D. Hambley

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela M. Vereb, Asst. Clerk