

## HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

August 18, 2020

Present: Legislators Randy LaChausse, Richard Chartrand, Greg Kulzer, Phil Hathway, and Andrea Moroughan.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Jerry King, Tom Osborne, and Ian Gilbert; County Manager Ryan Piche; County Atty. Joan McNichol; Treasurer Eric Virkler; and Human Resource Director Caitlyn Smith; and media representatives.

Committee Chairman Randy LaChausse called the meeting at 2:40 p.m. and declared the 7/21/2020 committee minutes approved by general consent.

### **Veterans' Service Agency Semi-Annual update – Stephen Kilionski (attached)**

Stephen handed out his Semi-Annual report showing the numbers are comparable to 2019 so far this year. There have been less individuals helped in 2020 at 474 versus 600 in 2019 however the compensation and pension award totals are much higher from roughly \$359,000.00 to \$407,665.00. The Average Medicaid savings is up from \$100,000.00 in 2019 to \$125,736.00 in 2020.

Stephen briefly explained three key items that are affecting his department: Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 which went into effect on January 1, 2020, which helped increase the total award payment in this area because more Veterans can apply for illnesses related to exposure to certain toxins in Vietnam; Caring for Survivors Act of 2020, which would increase payment for surviving dependents from \$1,350.00/month up to \$1,650.00/month; The Veterans Residential Care Choice Act would allow the VA to pay for eligible veterans to live at residential care facilities if the cost was lower than VA hospitals or nursing home facilities.

Ryan asked Lewis County General Hospital CEO, Jerry Cayer to come forward to address any question on the Hospital Surgical addition/renovation project. Legislator LaChausse questioned why the amount of the project seems to be increasing on a regular basis. Jerry explained that when the project was first discussed almost a year ago there were calculators used to determine costs in our area and the project originally came in at \$25 million. One of the main factors to the overall increase was due to the ground floor of the addition originally being left as a shell but further discussion lead to the determination that now is the best time to finish the area off and move all specialty services there to maintain a strong surgical presence.

The cost of the project now is \$32.4 million which also included increases in groundwork due to the amount of rock underneath the surface and increasing the parking area. Jerry responded to the question about a project manager and that cost is already figured into the project. There was an RFI sent out to 14 different vendors with 4 replies so next month the Hospital Board of Managers will move forward with that. Ryan explained that another reason for the increase is that the Hospital originally planned to put in \$5 million of their fund balance but due to the incredibly low interest rates has decided to bond the entire project. The current bond rate is 2% and the interest being received on the the \$5 million is more than that so it only makes sense to bond the full amount.

Jerry stated that everything has been looked over and the only unknowns at this point are the costs of steel and labor, which can be influenced by the timing of the bids. Jerry promised the Committee that the Hospital will not bring anything back that is over the \$33 million, they will find ways to cut costs. Jerry concluded by reporting that it looks very promising that they will get their Critical Access designation due to help from Elise Stefanik.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Resolution authorizing an agreement between the County of Lewis and New York State Office for the Aging to accept the ADRC – COVID-19 grant award in the amount of \$23,609.00 and to appropriate these funds.  
YEA   5   NAY   0
  
2. Resolution to amend the Compensation Plan with reference to the Public Health Department to Abolish a permanent PT Administrative Assistant at a salary Grade 15 and Create a permanent FT Administrative Assistant at a salary Grade 15. *Ryan clarified that this position was 4 days a week and with everything that is going on and the duties this individual does it merits 5 days a week.*  
YEA   5   NAY   0
  
3. Resolution to amend the Compensation Plan with reference to the Public Health Department to Create a permanent FT Public Health Nurse at a salary Grade 35. *Ryan stated this position is being funded by COVID-19 grant funds and will allow for a transition period as next year there is a Public Health Nurse who will be retiring, and that position will not be back filled.*  
YEA   5   NAY   0
  
4. Resolution authorizing agreements between Lewis County Public Health and Health Research, Inc. to accept COVID-19 related grant funds in the amount of \$296,318.00 and to appropriate these funds.  
YEA   5   NAY   0
  
5. Resolution authorizing a Memorandum of Understanding between Lewis County Public Health Agency and Community Action Planning Council for the purpose of Lewis County Public Health implementing the Council's Child Care Project to provide site visits to childcare programs; examine and verify childcare staff's certificates of training; review, approve, revise and sign childcare program's Health Care Plan; and notify Jefferson-Lewis Child Care Project if Health Care Plan is revoked for the term of October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021 at a rate of \$40.00 per unit of service.  
YEA   5   NAY   0
  
6. Resolution authorizing a renewal agreement with ICU Security & Private Investigations for armed security guard services for the DSS building located on Outer Stowe Street, at a cost not to exceed \$82,836.75 for the term commencing November 1, 2020 through October 31, 2021, with the local County share being 25%. *Legislator Kulzer took exception to the extreme cost of this service especially when the Sheriff's Department is right next door. Social Services Commissioner Jennifer Jones stated that they had a few incidents over the past couple of weeks where this service was needed due to clients becoming verbally abusive*

*and irate. The Security Guard was able to safely escort these individuals out of the building. Legislator Kulzer was opposed.*

YEA 4 NAY 1

7. Resolution to appropriate funds in the amount of \$22,148.44 for Program Year 2020 for the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2022 for the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs per the Notice of Obligational Authority #PY20-2, dated July 22, 2020 through the New York State Department of Labor. *Social Services Commissioner Jennifer Jones clarified that these funds come in throughout the year which is why no single amount seems that big.*

YEA 5 NAY 0

8. Resolution to amend the Compensation Plan with reference to Lewis County General Hospital to Abolish One (1) FT Health Management Transcriptionist and One (1) PT Health Information Management Clerk; and to Create One (1) PT Patient Access Clerk, One (1) FT Patient Account Clerk, One (1) FT Health Information Management Coder and One (1) FT Health Information Management Clerk. *Legislator Chartrand gave an in-depth explanation as to each of these position changes. The Hospital will not be refilling any casual positions in the future and overall these positions will be minimum impact to the budget.*

YEA 5 NAY 0

9. Resolution to reappoint members to the Board of Managers of the Lewis County General Hospital commencing January 1, 2021 and expiring December 31, 2025.

YEA 5 NAY 0

Legislator LaChausse questioned Jennifer Jones on the number of HEAP applications received in July. Jenny responded that HEAP not only covers repair and replacement of furnaces which gets addressed during the summer months, but it also covers AC units required for medical conditions. Jenny went on to explain that the SNAP numbers are much higher due to the pandemic. It was roughly \$290,000/month in the past and now has ballooned to \$520,000 in May and \$451,000 in July. One of the biggest contributing factors to the increase is that South Lewis School District offers free and reduced lunches to all school aged children due to the level of poverty throughout the area. Since school closed due to the pandemic there has been an increase in benefits for households with children. SNAP applicants have received the maximum benefit level since April, and it looks like that will continue. Clients who were receiving the additional \$600/week in unemployment were not eligible but since that program ended there are more who fit the eligibility guidelines.

Legislator Hathway inquired when the Congregate Meal sites would reopen, Ryan responded that he would have to check with OFA Director Crystal Collette. Public Health Director Ashley Waite stated that she believes Crystal was going to reach out to the aging population to get a feel if they were interested in the sites reopening.

Legislator LaChausse questioned who would be responsible for policing the gyms that reopen. Ashley Waite responded that the question was brought up to the state and it sounds like it would be the Local Health Department, but she is still awaiting more guidance in that area. She went on to state that if it dos fall to the Local Health Department, she will make sure that they know and understand the guidelines to complete the inspections accurately.

At 3:26 p.m. Legislator Chartrand made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Legislator Hathway and carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE**

SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT 2020		VETERAN STATUS										TYPE		MODE	SERVICES RENDERED																	RETROACTIVE AWARD AMOUNT		
LEWIS COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY		WW II	Korea	Vietnam	Gulf War	Iraq	Afghanistan	Cold War	Other	Original	Veteran	Dep/Widow/FM	Other/Agency	Personal	Tel/Mail/Elec/Fax	AD/DFAS/SBP	NYS Blind Annuity	Burial/Funeral/DC	Comp/SMC/DIC	Education/Tech	Voc Rehab&Empl	Life Insurance	Labor/Employ	Legal Assistance	Home Loan Guar	Medical/Dental	Pension/A&ANH	Social Security	Social Services	NYS VPTE	Discharge-DD 214	Other	Pension	Compensation
<b>SEMI-ANNUAL TOTAL</b>	<b>474</b>	13	13	133	23	61	25	4	18	12	290	82	102	104	370	24	16	51	228	39	19	25	20	20	25	212	105	28	91	83	119	391	\$19,506.79	\$388,158.30
																	<b>Combined Total</b>																	
																			\$407,665.09															

Number of Open/Active Claim Files: **63**

VA Disability Compensation Payments= **\$307,156.25**

VA Healthcare Enrollments= **73**

VA Education Payments= **\$42,030.67**

Average Medicaid Savings= **\$125,736.00**

VA Vocational Rehab Payments= **\$0.00**

Spending per enrollee estimates includes both State and Federal payments to Medicaid. These figures represent the average (mean) level of payments across Medicaid enrollees including those receiving full or partial Medicaid benefits, aged and individuals with disabilities.

VA Life Insurance Claim Payments= **\$38,971.38**

VA Pension Claim Payments= **\$19,506.79**

**Total Federal Funds into the County Economy for 1st & 2nd QTR, CY 2020= \$407,665.09**

**Highlights:**

- 1. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** began deciding claims for the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 on January 1st, 2020. The Act extends the presumption of herbicide exposure, that include toxins such as Agent Orange, to Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Signed into law Jun. 25, the law specifically affects Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veterans who served no more than 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 6, 1962 and May 7, 1975, as well as Veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between Jan. 1, 1967 and Aug. 31, 1971. These Veterans can now apply for disability compensation and other benefits if they have since developed one of 14 conditions that are presumed to be related to exposure to herbicides. Veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides.
- 2. H.R. 6933, the Caring for Survivors Act of 2020,** would increase payments for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for surviving dependents and would change eligibility to allow additional survivors to receive the benefit. Specifically, the measure would: 1. Increase the DIC rate to make it more equitable with rates provided to federal civilian employee survivors. The base rate of DIC would be increased to 55 percent of the rate of compensation paid to a totally disabled veteran. 2. Expand eligibility for DIC by replacing the "10-year" rule with a graduated scale of benefits that begins at five years for initial eligibility at 50% and gradually reaches the full benefit at 10 years after after determination of disability. If a veteran is rated as totally disabled for five years and dies of a nonservice-connected cause, a survivor would be entitled to 50% of the DIC benefit. 3. Reduce from 57 to 55 years, the age a surviving spouse may remarry and maintain their benefits, consistent with eligibility for other federal benefits for survivors.
- 3 The Veterans Residential Care Choice Act (H.R. 4985)** a bill that would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to pay for eligible veterans to live at residential care facilities such as assisted living facilities licensed or certified by the state if the cost of care is lower than it would be at other care sites including VA hospitals, nursing care or community nursing home facilities. Currently, VA may help veterans find a residential care facility to live in, but veterans and their families have to pay for it. The bill would also require any facility receiving VA payments to enter into an agreement with VA to ensure the facilities are adequate to serve the needs of veterans.