

## HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

August 17, 2021

Present: Legislators Andrea Moroughan, Richard Chartrand, Greg Kulzer, Phil Hathway, and Lisa Virkler.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Tom Osborne, and Ian Gilbert; County Manager Ryan Piche; County Atty. Joan McNichol; Treasurer Eric Virkler; and Human Resource Director Caitlyn Smith; and Information Technology Director Conner Biolsi.

Committee Chair Legislator Moroughan called the meeting at 2:12 p.m.

Legislator Virkler made a motion to accept the minutes from July 19, 2021 as recorded, seconded by Legislator Chartrand and carried.

### **Home Energy Assistance Program** – Katie Garito, Director of Economic Supports

Social Services Commissioner Jennifer Jones introduced Ms. Katie Garito as the Director of Economic Supports for Social Services. Katie explained that the Home Energy Assistance Program, also known to many as HEAP, is a federally funded energy program intended to provide assistance to low-income households in meeting their immediate home energy needs. HEAP is comprised of four components: Regular HEAP; Emergency HEAP; Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement; and Cooling Assistance Component.

Regular HEAP is designed to decrease a household's energy cost and is structured to ensure that the highest benefits are paid to those households with vulnerable individuals with the highest energy costs. Also operated under the heating component is the Clean and Tune (C&T) benefit which is designed to clean and tune an eligible household's primary heating equipment. Clean and Tune is meant to prevent more costly repairs under the Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement Program.

Emergency HEAP is a benefit designed to meet a household's immediate energy needs. The Emergency benefit component has been designed to resolve energy crisis situations including heating fuel shortage and utility shutoff emergencies. This component requires that clients have received a Regular HEAP Benefit and have exhausted those funds first. In the past few years there have been three rounds of Emergency HEAP per season.

Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement, known as HERR is a benefit available to assist homeowners in repairing or replacing primary heating equipment when the equipment is inoperable or unsafe and is in need of repair or replacement. This component has the most requirements for clients and the district to meet as the maximum benefit amount being paid out is up to \$6,500.00.

Cooling Assistance Component, also known as CAC provides an air conditioner or fan to HEAP eligible households that include an individual with a documented medical condition that is exacerbated by extreme heat. The benefits authorized and benefits issued for the 2019/2020 HEAP Season were: Regular HEAP had 1,824 benefits authorized and \$1,094,538.72 benefits

issued; Emergency HEAP had 1,181 and \$686,435.00; Furnace Repair/Replacement has 12 and \$41,395.48; Cooling had 41 and \$26,090.40; and Clean & Tune had 61 and \$15,008.69. The 2020/2021 HEAP Season (through July 31, 2021 so not the entire season as it ends in August 31<sup>st</sup>) results are: Regular HEAP has 1,788 benefits authorized and \$1,084,077.45 benefits issued; Emergency HEAP has 821 and \$456,915.38; Furnace Repair/Replacement has 8 and \$20,294.08; Cooling has 9 and \$6,150.00; and Clean & Tune has 83 and \$20,370.21.

Social Services is required to provide an Alternate Certifier, which is currently contracted through Office For the Aging and they assist with the clients over the age of 60. Alternate Certifiers are responsible for providing outreach and intake sites for regular and emergency benefits only; they must assist clients in completing applications and collection of documentation; and they must send all applications and supporting documentation to Social Services for determination of eligibility. In the current HEAP season, Office For the Aging has assisted with 333 applications.

Legislator Virkler asked about the decrease in the benefits issued over last year and Katie responded that it was because the report she had only showed through the end of July and there is still the month of August left in the HEAP season. Legislator Hathway pointed out the significant decrease in the Emergency HEAP benefits and Katie explained that because HEAP runs almost year-round most individuals can utilize the Regular HEAP benefits instead of Emergency HEAP. Jenny Jones pointed out that there have been several stimulus payments over the past several months which helped offset some of those emergency needs. The first couple weeks in October are incredibly busy with HEAP opening for the season.

Office For the Aging Director Crystal Collette spoke to the amount of work and hours that are required in being the Alternate Certifier. Jenny Jones pointed out that there is an early mailing that goes out to remind of the upcoming season which creates many phone calls especially from the elderly.

### **COVID-19 update** – Ashley Waite, Public Health Director

Ashley reported that positive cases have trended up over the last 3 weeks, with 39 positive cases last week with a 4.7% positivity rate. There have been some breakthrough cases which are positive cases in individuals who are vaccinated. The breakthrough cases have very mild symptoms and are not just happening in Lewis County but across the State. Ashley stressed that it is still incredibly important to get vaccinated because that is preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths.

There are currently two individuals who are hospitalized. The county is currently at 59% of the adult population with at least one dose of the vaccine. Over the last three weeks, there has been an increase in individuals who are looking to be vaccinated. Yesterday, NYS Governor Cuomo mandated that all healthcare workers get vaccinated and Public Health is awaiting more clarification on that. There was also an announcement that a third dose of the vaccine could be given to those that are immuno-compromised, which is not saying that anyone needs a booster dose.

Legislator Hathway questioned what the symptoms of a mild case would be, Ashley responded that people with mild symptoms have experienced gastrointestinal issues, cold like symptoms, headache, and an overall feeling of being run down. These cases have not shown symptoms of shortness of breath or needing any type of hospitalization or doctor visit. Legislator Hathway questioned how Lewis County compares to Jefferson or St. Lawrence Counties in positivity rate, Ashley responded that Lewis County has always tended to be at a higher rate which is in part due to the low volume of individuals being tested.

Legislator Kulzer voiced his opinion that wearing a mask all day must collect quite a bit of bacteria and how that can't be good for an individual on a long-term basis. Legislator Chartrand questioned if the trailer that Public Health requested was ordered yet, Ashley responded that it hasn't been ordered yet because there are certain things the State has to sign off on yet.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Resolution re-appointing Michael F. Young of Lowville, NY as a member of the Board of Managers of the Lewis County General Hospital commencing January 1, 2022 and expiring on December 31, 2026.  
AYE   5   NAY   0
  
2. Resolution to authorize agreement between Lewis County Public Health Agency and NYS Department of Health to accept Public Health Corps Fellowship Program Funding, Create three (3) Full-Time positions and appropriate funds in the amount of \$548,752.00  
AYE   5   NAY   0
  
3. Resolution to authorize a one-year extension agreement between the Lewis County Department of Social Services and ICU Security & Private Investigations for armed security guard services for the DSS building for the period from November 1, 2021 through October 31, 2022 at a cost not to exceed \$82,836.75 with the local County share being 25%.  
*Legislator Kulzer was opposed.*  
AYE   4   NAY   1
  
4. Resolution to authorize an agreement between the Lewis County Department of Social Services and Melissa M. Maine, LCSW-R to conduct assessments on children being placed in a New York State Qualified Residential Treatment Program commencing on October 1, 2021.  
AYE   5   NAY   0
  
5. Resolution approving the 2021 Resource Allocation Plan between the County of Lewis and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services for the 2021 program year in the amount of \$46,399.00, including Safe Harbour funding.  
AYE   5   NAY   0

**Motions:**

1. Legislator Virkler made a motion to authorize Social Services Commissioner Jennifer Jones to refill one (1) Caseworker position effective immediately due to resignation, seconded by Legislator Moroughan and carried.

At 2:52 p.m. Legislator Virkler made a motion to enter executive session for discussion on a personnel matter, seconded by Legislator Chartrand and carried.

At 3:10 p.m. Legislator Chartrand made a motion to enter regular session, seconded by Legislator Virkler and carried.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Virkler made a motion to adjourn at 3:11 p.m., seconded by Legislator Kulzer and carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board