

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
September 21, 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; and Human Resource Director Caitlyn Smith; and Information Technology Director Conner Biolsi.

Committee Chair Legislator Moroughan called the meeting at 3:04 p.m.

Legislator Virkler made a motion to accept the minutes from August 17, 2021 as recorded, seconded by Legislator Hathway and carried.

Lewis County Health System update – Jerry Cayer, CEO

Prior to Jerry getting started Legislator Moroughan stated that she had went to the hospital for a test and had a wonderful experience.

Jerry reported that the vaccination rate is in the mid 80's, and as of 7:00 a.m. this morning there have been 45 resignations received. Prior to the mandate the hospital had 71 full-time/part-time positions posted and 33 casual positions open. That means that soon there will be 148 open positions at the hospital, and there are 79 individuals who are not disclosing their intentions at this time. There is a temporary refraining order on religious exemptions which now extends the deadline for vaccination until October 12th for the 14 individuals who have applied. The hospital is the one who has to validate the sincerity or conviction of the person, which is difficult because there is no training on how to determine what is in someone's heart when it comes to faith. The decision becomes an internal one with a document that gets filed in their personnel file. The Refraining Order only applies to those who have the exemption filed.

Jerry went on to explain that many people wonder why hospitals can't just come together and oppose this, it just isn't possible. NYS Public Health passed an order and the Department of Health issued it to hospitals which must be followed. The biggest hurdle is that the hospital accepts Medicare and Medicaid payments, so it must follow the rules.

Lewis County continues to remain in the top 3 counties for highest 14-day positivity rate for Covid-19. At one point, the hospital had 10 staff not working due to being isolated or quarantined, add that to the already 71 open positions that causes a major problem with staffing. The vaccine is the best answer, but the shortfall was the mandate that occurred out of nowhere. The pandemic has had a significant impact on finances. In August, the hospital reported a \$324,000 loss and the year-to-date loss is \$994,000. Nursing Home testing is a large expense, agency Nursing staff to assist with staffing shortages is expensive as their maternity staff is anywhere from \$180/hour to \$250/hour depending on their skill level. Michelle Prince is working on how to staff the maternity department but in the meantime, there are MOUs in place with other nearby hospitals to transfer care of patients.

Areas of concern are the maternity department, dietary department which may result in the temporary close of the cafeteria, outside practices, nursing home although it is likely that the remaining 22 unvaccinated will get their first shot by the deadline, and surgery department.

Legislator Hathway questioned the financial outlook, Jerry responded that it is concerning because they budgeted for the known but just the opposite has happened with the mandate. The Hospital is re-evaluating the capital project and the assumptions tied to that. Although the new Governor indicated that help would be sent there hasn't been any help from Albany.

Legislator Gilbert thought that even though this policy was imposed on the hospital they went to great lengths to try and receive a hardship exemption. Jerry went on to report that Nursing Home visitations have been paused again and over all visitation in the hospital is limited. Legislator Kulzer felt strongly that Jerry Cayer has done a fantastic job with being transparent and that the Board should assist with the hospital project so it can move forward giving the hospital a future. Jerry concluded by stating that there is a critical worker shortage and that is where the conversation needs to be had with Albany.

COVID-19 update – Ashley Waite, Public Health Director

Ashley reported there are 129 active cases, 8 current hospitalizations making a total of 21 hospitalizations in September, 3 recent pediatric admissions, 362 in quarantine, 35 cases on Monday, 24 school cases last week, 18 school cases so far for Monday and Tuesday, 6 cases of spread inside a school, and 262 students quarantined. Vaccine numbers are up as clinics continue and individual appointments with Public Health can be made. There is a 3rd dose recommendation for individuals who are immunocompromised, this is not the booster dose as there is no guidance on that yet.

The vaccine for 5- to 11-year-olds should be approved in October. As of September 9th, there is 57% of the county that has had one dose. The relationship between Public Health and school remains good. Legislator Chartrand reminded everyone that the media numbers need to be taken into context with the per capita population. In response to Legislator Kulzer, Ashley reported that the 15- to 19-year-old population is 56% vaccinated. In response to Legislator Virkler, Ashley reported that due to the increasing surge Public Health is filling more of the per diem positions and asking some county staff to assist. There will be a press briefing Thursday with new data to show the effectiveness of the vaccine. Legislator Virkler ended by making a statement that people with Covid-19 are much sicker this time around, than last fall.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Appropriating funds in the Office For the Aging Department accounts in the amount of \$18,664.00 for additional grant funding related to Covid-19.
AYE 5 NAY 0
2. Accepting Covid-19 vaccine response grant funds in the amount of \$68,134.51 from New York State Department of Health.
AYE 5 NAY 0

3. Approving renewal agreement between Lewis County Public Health Agency and Birnie Bus Service, Inc. for transportation services required for the preschool special education program for the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022.
AYE 5 NAY 0
4. Appointing member to Health Services Advisory Board for the term of January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2025.
AYE 5 NAY 0
5. Transfer funds in Public Health Department accounts in the amount of \$250,000.00 to an appropriate expenditure account.
AYE 5 NAY 0
6. Authorizing acceptance of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families allocation for Non-Residential DV services in the amount of \$25,000.00 and agreement between Lewis County Department of Social Services and Lewis County Opportunities, Inc for a term of January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022.
AYE 5 NAY 0
7. Amending compensation plan with reference to Department of Social Services to abolish one (1) full-time Homemaker position at grade 10 and create one (1) full-time Case Aid position at grade 12.
AYE 5 NAY 0
8. Appropriating funds for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in the amount of \$28,614.40.
AYE 5 NAY 0

The following motions were made:

1. Legislator Moroughan made a motion to authorize Social Services Commissioner, Jennifer Jones to refill one (1) full-time Secretary to the Commissioner position effective immediately, seconded by Legislator Virkler and carried.
2. Legislator Moroughan made a motion to authorize Social Services Commissioner, Jennifer Jones to refill one (1) full-time caseworker position effective immediately due to resignation, seconded by Legislator Virkler and carried.
3. Legislator Moroughan made a motion to authorize Social Services Commissioner, Jennifer Jones to refill one (1) full-time Fiscal Manager position effective immediately due to pending resignation on 12/31/2021, seconded by Legislator Virkler and carried.

At 3:58 p.m. Legislator Chartrand made a motion to enter executive session for discussion on legal matters pertaining to the Lewis County Health System, seconded by Legislator Hathway and carried.

At 4:15 p.m., Legislator Virkler made a motion to enter regular session, seconded by Legislator Moroughan and carried.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Chartrand made a motion to adjourn at 4:16 p.m., seconded by Legislator Virkler and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board