

Social Services Budget Shows Serious Shortfall

BY SUSAN USHER

By early November Brunswick County commissioners will be asked to increase funding for several social services programs.

A shortfall in funds for three services the agency is required to provide prompted members of the Brunswick County Board of Social Services to vote Monday night to seek the additional funds as soon as possible.

They also met in executive session for 45 minutes on a legal matter, taking no action.

In regard to the funding shortage, Director Jamie Orrock will prepare a projection of the agency's needs for consideration at the board's October 28 meeting, with plans to present the request to commissioners at their Nov. 4 meeting.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children, foster care and rest home care programs are expected to exceed their budgets this fiscal year. AFDC is budgeted at \$162,704 and has spent \$31,394; rest home care for \$95,240, with 120,062 spent; and state foster home care, \$4,796, with \$1,186 spent.

Orrock attributed the problem to two things. "We were slightly underbudgeted and then the state raised the rate for some programs after the budget had already been adopted."

The agency must submit its budget to the county in April, for tentative adoption by commissioners by June 1, and final adoption by July 1. The General Assembly acted on the social services measures late in its 1985 session.

Overpending had also occurred in several administrative areas, including travel and training and the board's own per diem. Since July 1, the board has spent \$599.80 of its \$3,000 budget.

"You've got to stop meeting so much," Director Jamie Orrock quipped.

But these expenditures can be handled by adjusting

other line items in the administrative budget, a change not possible in the other programs, where funds allocated to one program cannot be spent for another. Money that isn't used must go back to the state.

The agency's budget was created a little bit differently this spring than in the past, since it had been without a director for some time. County officials prepared the budget document with the help of a regional DSS official.

Overtime Changes

At least for now, beginning October 1 social workers will no longer receive compensatory time off for hours they spend on call or answering calls on nights and weekends.

Social workers I and II, like the director, supervisors and the accountant V are among the executive, professional and administrative employees considered "exempt" from overtime provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act as interpreted in the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Garcia vs. San Antonio. The categorization is based on employees' job descriptions.

In the Garcia case, the court ruled that non-exempt workers who work more than a standard work week must be paid in cash, not with "compensatory time off" for the extra hours logged, and that the method of compensation must be uniform.

"Are you going to expect them to do this for nothing?" asked Evelyn Johnson, services supervisor. "What you're going to have is mass confusion and uncovered areas."

"And I know who is going to get stuck with the calls," she added.

At her suggestion, the board asked Orrock to check to see if the social workers can still receive time off for "on call" hours.

While other options may be available in that area, Orrock said, "I think our hands are going to be pretty well tied regarding who is exempt and who is non-exempt."

Chairman Frankie Rabon said he thought employees who work overtime should be compensated in some way, with Orrock agreeing.

In the meantime, also to bring the agency in compliance with provisions of the act, the board adopted a standard work-week that begins at 5:01 p.m. Friday and continues until 5 p.m. the following Friday. By including the weekend in the 40-hour work week the agency should reduce the likelihood of incurring overtime charges, Orrock noted, since employees can vary their daily hours within that period.

Ms. Johnson said that she and a number of other social workers were told when hired that they could get time off for time spent on call. The agency began providing the compensatory time off for on-call duty about three years ago, at the request of the social work staff.

Orrock will also investigate the availability of county vehicles for use by the social services staff, and whether operating costs for the vehicles would cost less than paying mileage to workers who use their own vehicles. Ms. Johnson had asked about vehicles for the social workers, saying their 20 cents per mile mileage reimbursement rate did not cover the expenses incurred in use of the vehicles.

Chore Service

Board members also approved a chore program waiting list policy, as required by the state, which puts adults who need the service as part of a protective service plan at the top of the list.

Previously, said Services Supervisor Evelyn Johnson, these adults were in the same priority group as the aged and disabled. "It was a judgment call on the part of the worker to decide who received the service," she said.

Applicants on the waiting list will be contacted every 90 days to see if they still want the service and to reassess their status. At the end of one year on the list, they must reapply.

Other Business

In other business, the board:
 • Agreed to seek \$10,000 available from the state Division of Social Services for a protective services worker, with plans to use the money to create a part-time, temporary position to relieve some of the demands on that unit. In August the unit received 21 reports of child abuse or neglect, four reports of adult abuse or neglect and additional information on two existing reports. Between Sept. 1 and Sept. 20, another 20 reports have been filed. The unit has a total caseload of 85.

• Reviewed Orrock's responses to management items contained in the agency's 1982-83 audit report, and approved its forwarding to the N.C. Secretary of Human Resources.

• Agreed to hire a temporary eligibility specialist to help process low-income energy program applications.

• Met behind closed doors for approximately 45 minutes to discuss a letter from David Clegg, county attorney, and Bill Fairley, who has represented Orrock in a legal matter, regarding "legal representation for the director," then took no action.

• Voted not to advance funds for Accountant Linda Green to attend the fourth session of a four-part supervisor's workshop sponsored by the Institute of Government. At the time the board agreed to send her to the sessions, she was supervising a number of clerical employees, but not any more.

Also, Director Jamie Orrock said the travel funds could be better spent elsewhere, for local mileage incurred by the services staff, for instance. The state will provide in-county workshops on performance appraisal and other management skills for all supervisory staff, he said. The board suggesting a workshop be requested here since overpending is already a problem in the travel and training budget.

Board member Louis "Bobby" Brown was the only member to vote against the motion.



PEARL S. BRO

DSS Switchboard Getting Overdue Relief

BY SUSAN USHER

If you've tried time and again without success to reach the Brunswick County Social Services Department by telephone, your luck should soon improve.

Several changes approved Monday night by the Brunswick County Board of Social Services are expected improve the flow of calls into and out of what may be the busiest switchboard at the county government center.

"There are probably more calls to this agency than to any other one out here," special services coordinator David Sellers of Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp. told board members Monday night.

On Friday, he reported, the agency's four local lines and two outside lines handled 253 incoming and 372 outgoing calls. After a week-long survey, he said Friday was about average.

"If you try to call and can't get us, now you know why," interjected Director Jamie Orrock.

Incoming calls were handled in about one minute each.

"While it's possible for you to dial and the telephone to ring for five or six minutes without an answer, she's really getting rid of these calls fairly fast," said Sellers, referring to clerk-receptionist Pearl S. Brown.

The agency agreed to reserve its four existing local lines for incoming calls only, adding two additional lines that will be reserved for outgoing calls only. Individual "foreign exchange" lines to serve clients in the Leland and in the Southport-Oak Island areas will continue to handle

both incoming and outgoing calls. Their volume does not warrant additional access at this time, Sellers said.

The agency will also hire as soon as possible an additional clerk-receptionist to share the workload at the front desk and switchboard. The telephone area will be isolated with a plexiglass wall.

A paging system with five speakers at various locations in the agency is also expected to increase the speed with which the switchboard handles calls. It provides a way to notify a worker away from the desk that he or she has a call. The office telephone system already allows workers to plug into their own extensions from any telephone in the office.

Sellers identified several problems with the lines as they are now exist. The four local lines, as well as the foreign exchange lines, handle both incoming and outgoing calls, he said, which means that heavy staff use in the mornings and late afternoon sometimes blocks the flow of calls coming in.

This results in a "sporadic" pat-

tern of calls at the switchboard, he added. At moments when all lines are suddenly freed, he said, the switchboard is "flooded with calls" on all

Sheriff's Office Reports Activity

Brunswick County Sheriff's deputies drove 81,042 miles in August using 5,889 gallons of gas and 17 quarts of oil.

Deputies summoned 120 witnesses, made 24 arrests as prosecuting witness, and served 497 civil papers. They also served 246 local warrants, 81 foreign warrants and three mental and inebriate papers. Eighty-nine doors and windows were found open.

The department answered 894 calls and made 61 investigations. Officers spent 21 court hours spent on duty, 28 hours off duty, and 320 hours as duty officer. Officers recovered \$1,000 of stolen property.

Deputies also made 17 trips out of the county and held eight crime prevention meetings.

four lines, which causes additional delay in answering the telephone.

"I hope we can get a more consistent flow of traffic," he said.

The two foreign exchange lines are the only additions to the agency's phone system since DSS moved to the county government center.

The two outgoing phone lines will cost \$63.70 to install, and will add \$57.60 per month to the agency's phone bill, Sellers said. The paging system has a one-time cost of \$325, which includes purchase, installation and one year's maintenance.

"It's the best package available to meet the department's current needs," said board member Malcolm Grissett, who also works for ATMC. "It might need revision in the future."

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GETTING A CALL through to the Brunswick County Social Services Department should get a little easier in the near future, making work a little more pleasant for Clerk-Receptionist Pearl Brown. Four lines will be reserved for incoming calls only and a clerk-receptionist hired to help handle the traffic at the front desk and switchboard.

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