

Department Of Social Services To Undergo State Review

BY TERRY POPE

A \$29,000 fine is at stake Monday when a state monitoring team arrives at the Brunswick County Department of Social Services to begin randomly checking the department's handling of welfare and disability Medicaid applications.

The N.C. Department of Human Resources Division of Social Services review team will examine applications for Aid To Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) and disability Medicaid (MAD) to see if they are being processed properly and on a timely basis.

Scoring poorly on the review will result in fines of 7.5 percent of DSS's annual administrative costs for the two programs, or about \$29,000, said DSS Director Jamie Orrock.

"It's an audit of our program," said Orrock. "It's going to be interesting. I'm sure."

Orrock has publicly criticized the state monitorings, saying they are designed for counties to fail.

Last October, the county scored 298 out of a possible 500 points on the review. To avoid penalties this year, it must score 375 or higher.

"The last time only two cases were found with errors," Orrock said, "and it got us below 300. If they find two cases again, we've had it."

A 1989 court ruling ordered that all 100 counties in the state undergo a review of its programs sponsored by the DSS.

Plaintiffs in *Alexander vs. Flaherty*, first filed in 1974, alleged that the state's social services departments were not processing applications quickly enough. A consent order in 1989 requires that each department be monitored for policy and procedure by an outside team of reviewers.

"There's really no way to prepare for it," said Orrock. "You just have

to do your best job everyday."

If fined, the money would have to come from the county budget and not from the DSS budget, Orrock said.

DSS Board Chairman Frankie Rabon, who is also District 4 county commissioner, said a fine is still cheaper than hiring additional workers to handle an increase in paperwork.

"One worker could cause you all of the mistakes," said Rabon.

Last year, the county lost 40 points because a letter denying an AFDC application was mailed on the 46th day of a 45-day deadline, said Orrock. The information had been logged before the 45th day, but a letter had not been mailed, he said.

"I don't think hiring staff is necessarily going to solve your problems," said Orrock. "It could be a good worker that during some period has some problems and makes mistakes. The person that doesn't

make a mistake is a person that doesn't do anything."

Orrock said the department is charged with making sure clients receive benefits on time, regardless of how workers deal with the paperwork to arrive at that decision.

"They're doing the best under pressure situations," said Orrock. "Perfection isn't possible."

The fines would be levied against the county and payable up to January 1993. Money from the fines go into a state emergency medical assistance program for the poor.

In other business Monday, the board:

■awarded a plaque to Malcolm Grissett, who served on the board from 1985 to 1991;

■heard that Donna Fullwood had been transferred from social work to the county JOBS program, which began July 1;

■accepted routine case actions and agency reports from department heads.



THE BRUNSWICK COUNTY BOARD of Social Services honored Malcolm Grissett Monday for his six years on the board. Chairman Frankie Rabon (right) presented a plaque to Grissett, who has been replaced on the board by his wife, Brenda.

DSS Board Told Seniors Can't Afford Services

BY TERRY POPE

Chris Stewart used a penny and a soda can tab to make a point at the Brunswick County Board of Social Services meeting Monday.

The tab contained a single penny and was fastened to a piece of paper, on which was written, "Senior Citizen Money Clip."

"I would hope that in the future, you would consider that when you are conducting business," Ms. Stewart told the board, which quietly passed the penny around.

"The senior citizens cannot afford private pay," she said.

Ms. Stewart has resigned from her job as supervisor of chore workers for the Brunswick County Department of Social Services.

Chore workers provide in-home care for patients who are just one

step away from being placed into a nursing or rest home. The chore program, now in its 15th year at DSS, is state-funded through CAP services, or the Community Alternatives Program.

Ms. Stewart left her job in protest of budget cuts for the county's senior citizen programs.

Brunswick County Commissioners voted to cut chore workers pay from 40 hours a week to 36 hours per week. The staff of 35 chore workers earn \$4.16 per hour, or about \$8,450 annually, to care for the elderly.

Ms. Stewart told the board that she didn't want to dwell on the issue at Monday's meeting. Pointing to the penny, she added, "I think that says it all."

The cut in hours means services must also be cut for those served by chore programs. DSS Adult Services Supervisor Evelyn Johnson said cutting chore workers' hours may have a harmful effect on the elderly population.

"What's going to happen, with a lot of them, is they're going to end up in nursing homes," said Ms. Johnson.

Brunswick County has 35 chore positions, but currently only 33 of those are filled. Those two vacancies existed before the budget cutbacks, said DSS Director Jamie Orrock.

Board member Eulis Willis of Navassa asked if the reduction in hours has any senior citizens complaining.

"There are always going to be people complaining," said Orrock. "I haven't been bombarded. I think they realize the budget situation. Nobody wants a reduction. The realization is that it happened."

Chore providers operate through three programs to provide care for patients who qualify for Medicaid. Currently, 20 residents are being served through the department's CAP program, 27 through Personal Care Services and 44 through Title 20. More chronically ill patients are served through CAP.

Last year, the county supplemented the chore program with \$87,436 but allocated no money toward the program this year.

County commissioners have stated that they want the chore program to operate on state funding alone.

Trial Moved To Bolivia

A Columbus County man charged with the shooting death of a Columbus County sheriff's deputy will be tried for his life in Brunswick County Superior Court in Bolivia.

Michael Thomas Brown, 18, of Brunswick, a town in Columbus County, had his trial on first-degree murder charges transferred to Brunswick County Superior Court last week, said District Attorney Rex Gore.

Gore serves the 13th Judicial District, which includes Brunswick, Columbus and Bladen counties.

A motion by Brown's attorney, Michael Ramos of Shallotte, argued that because of pre-trial publicity the defendant would not receive a fair trial in Columbus County, said Gore.

Brown and another defendant, Aquino Lee Williams, 16, were each charged by SBI agents following the June 18 shooting death of Cpl. Bob Hinson, who had gone to Brunswick to answer a fake break-in call.

Brown was 17 years of age at the time of the shooting and has recently turned 18. Williams had just turned 16 at the time of the crime.

Because of his age, Williams cannot be tried for his life, said Gore. State law prohibits the death sentence for persons under 17 at the time a crime has been committed.

Prosecutors can seek a maximum sentence of life in prison plus 60 years for Williams on first-degree murder and other charges.

Each is charged with first-degree murder, conspiracy to commit murder and first-degree armed robbery.

The defendants are accused of

placing a fake break-in call in the early morning hours of June 18 in an alleged plot to kill a police officer. Hinson was shot in the head as he sat in his patrol car off of N.C. 130 near Brunswick.

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Speed Limit On Calabash Streets Drops To 30 MPH

BY TONIA TREST

The speed limit on town-owned streets is dropping to 30 mph in Calabash, but speeders may not have much to worry about for now since the town has no police force.

Calabash Commissioners adopted the ordinance Tuesday night, in effect lowering the speed limit by 5 mph. The limit on state-owned roads, such as N.C. 179, will not change.

Enforcement remains a question. "We'll get it on the books now and enforcement will come later," said

Commissioner Ray Card.

The speed limit was one of several actions taken by the board during the 1 1/2 hour regular meeting. Commissioners Phyllis Manning and George Anderson were absent.

Billboard Rule Opposed
Commissioners plan to write state legislators and the N.C. League of Municipalities opposing H.B. 1009. Also opposed by the League, the bill would keep cities and counties from adopting billboard ordinances with amortization provisions between now and July 1, 1993. It also freezes

existing ordinances for two years, in effect giving billboard owners an extra two years of use. "That's fighting our ordinances," said Commissioner Stuart Thorn, who proposed the letter.

Not Town's Problem
Members agreed that complaints about the quality of water distributed by Carolina-Blythe, a private utility company that serves some Calabash residents, are not the town's responsibility.

"We should not get involved and should leave it up to the consumers of Carolina Blythe," said Commissioner Edward Rice. "As long as it is passing health inspections, we don't have any jurisdiction over it."

Several customers had complained about "foul-tasting" water.

Other Business
In other business, commissioners: ■After a 15-minute executive session, increased Building Inspector Ed Schaack's annual pay from

\$13,000 to \$15,500 for the balance of his contract, which ends July 1992.

■Approved agreements with Carolina Shores Property Owners that 1) affirm the town's five-year lease of the dump site on Persimmon Road while ensuring the POA's right to enter and leave the property; and 2) turn over to the town, from the POA, ditchbanks in Acreage Estates. This will make it easier for the town to mow there.

■Planned, at their Aug. 13 meeting, to hear proposals from Powell Associates of North Myrtle Beach, S.C., and The Wooten Company of Raleigh for a sewer treatment system study.

■Announced that a representative of the Southeastern Chamber of Commerce will attend the 9 a.m. July 31 meeting of the Calabash Merchants Association at Captain John's Restaurant to discuss steps involved in setting up a chamber of commerce.

Holden Beach Vote Rejects All-Terrain Vehicle Proposal

On a split vote, Holden Beach Commissioners rejected a proposal Tuesday to purchase an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) for use on the strand by beach patrol and police officers.

Commissioner Judy Bryan's motion to buy the 1988 ATV for \$2,995 was defeated by one vote. Gay Atkins, Bob Buck and Gloria Barrett voted against the purchase, and Kenner Amos and Mrs. Bryan voted in favor.

Mrs. Bryan and Amos said the beach patrol could use the small, open vehicle instead of full-size trucks on the beach.

They said it can be difficult to see out of the trucks, and that can be dangerous when there are large crowds and small children on the strand.

Amos said he recently saw a small child run in front of the beach patrol vehicle and came close to being hit. "Apparently it just doesn't make a lot of sense and nobody sees it."

Other board members, however, wanted to postpone the purchase since the tourist season is nearly over and the town is in the process

of developing a comprehensive beach and water safety program.

Ms. Atkins said the beach patrol can walk on the strand if trucks are so dangerous. She also was concerned about spending money that could otherwise be used for new police cars.

In other business Tuesday, commissioners voted unanimously against paying landscaping contractor Lester Grissett any more money for clearing lots on the island.

Commissioner Bob Buck said the town had entered into a contract with Grissett, but some of the work that the contractor completed wasn't ordered by the town.

The vote followed an hour-long executive session which Mayor John Tandy said was called to discuss a "legal threat." Grissett met with the board for about 40 minutes behind closed doors.

Also Tuesday night, commissioners set a special meeting for Thursday, Aug. 1, on merit pay increases for town employees. The meeting starts at 10 a.m. in town hall.

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