

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
April 18, 2023

Present: Lisa Virkler, Chair; Andrea Moroughan, Vice-Chair; Richard Chartrand; and Jeffrey Nellenback. Legislator Jessica Moser was excused.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Josh Leviker, Phil Hathway, Thomas Osborne and Ian Gilbert; County Manager, Ryan Piche; County Treasurer, Eric Virkler; Human Resources Director, Caitlyn Smith; and County Attorney, Joan McNichol.

Chair Legislator Virkler called the meeting to order at 2:21 p.m.

Legislator Virkler moved to accept the March 21, 2023 minutes, seconded by Legislator Moroughan and carried.

Chair Legislator Virkler congratulated Legislator Jessica Moser and her husband Marcus on their new baby girl. She announced and encouraged attendance at the Old Port Leyden School Open House which will be from 9:00 a.m. to Noon on April 22nd and Bridges Out of Poverty Training which will be on May 11th and is free. She felt strongly that the Bridges Out of Poverty is incredibly motivating.

Preschool Special Education Rate Increase Justification – Ashley Waite, Public Health Director

Ashley Waite, Public Health Director began by giving an overview of the Preschool Special Education program. It is a program that ensures preschool children (age 3 to 5) with disabilities receive timely and appropriate services in the least restrictive environment, program are provided at no cost to the parent, need for services is based upon professional evaluations, child's school district in collaboration with the county and parents decide how the services will be administered, Lewis County Public Health bills for the administration of the program on behalf of the school districts and the county, and the program is paid for by a combination of state and county funds.

Preschool Special Education services include Evaluations, Special Education Interant Teacher (SEIT), Center Based Services (Institution Tuition), Transportation to and from Institutions, and Related Services such as physical therapy; speech therapy; occupational therapy; psychological services; and 1:1 aide. The current reimbursement structure is that the providers bill Lewis County Public Health (LCPH) for services, LCPH pays the providers and then bills the State for services, NYS reimburses LCPH 59.5% of the cost of services and LCPH bills Medicaid for related services (this has helped save the county money as about 50% of the children are on Medicaid), then NYS takes back 50% of what Medicaid pays LCPH.

The goal of Lewis County Public Health is to provide the highest quality services to the children of Lewis County in the most cost-effective way. Current data shows

that in 2022 there were 229 children served, one was with Center Based Services. The total program expenses were \$941,549.00 and LCPH brought in \$670,532.00 with billing and NYS reimbursement. A child who needs Center Based Services costs approximately \$100,000 a year on average. Switching transportation costs to VTC has helped save money.

The reasons to increase rates for providers is that the Early Intervention Providers are set to get an 11% increase when the NYS 2023-2024 budget passes. LCPH must remain competitive with these rates as these are often the same providers, and all counties are fighting for their services. The current rate for Early Intervention providers is \$66.66 so with an added 11% increase it would bring it up to \$73.99. There are many counties that are looking to increase preschool rates for the upcoming school year, Lewis County is not the only one.

Service providers are only allowed to bill for time providing the actual service, not documentation or travel time. LCPH has lost service providers to school as they have a better schedule, consistent pay and benefits. The current range of PT, OT and ST is \$40.00 (in NYC) to \$80 (in rural small counties). There is now a waiting list that is growing to get children in this program due to a statewide shortage in service providers and the complexity of children who need several services.

The proposed new rates for individual/group for 1:1 Aide are \$17.00/\$8.50; Audiology \$177.50/\$100.00; Psychological \$100.00/\$75.00; Occupational Therapy \$74.00/\$65.00; Physical Therapy \$74.00/\$65.00; Physical Therapy Assistant \$55.00/\$47.00; and Speech Therapy \$74.00/\$65.00. In conclusion the requested new rates would be effective July 5, 2023. The LCPH budget did already include a rate increase for half the year knowing that the wait lists were growing. Our community can not afford to lose more providers, we need to recruit more to meet the growing demand. Early services improve the child's quality of life and decreases the need for services during school age years.

Legislator Virkler clarified that these providers are contracted, not employees, so they have expenses and no security. LCHS is posting and trying to hire therapists to help fill this need. Ashley finished by stating the Becky Kelly has worked very diligently on this to help save the county money but also to keep kids in the least restrictive environment.

The following draft resolutions were reviewed:

1. Authorizing adjustments to Preschool Provider Service Rates with Lewis County Public Health Department effective July 5, 2023, to make the rates competitive with the intention of enticing other providers to contract with the County in order to meet the growing demand of children that need these services which should combat the waitlist of students.

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There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Virkler moved to adjourn at 2:45 p.m., seconded by Legislator Moroughan and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board