
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: GOVERNOR
FROM: SMITH
SUBJECT: UPCOMING MEETING WITH PACT / SHORTAGE OF DHS SOCIAL WORKERS
DATE: 1/9/02
CC: RENICK, LEE ANN, ARMERITA

The following is the action plan for the meeting with PACT and Gordon Myrick.

Players:

PACT Members- Several members are members of the Social Worker Association. Judge Alfonso is a member of the group. Several social workers in this group previously worked for DHS and left the agency angry. They were adversarial when DHS staff met with them before, according to Thelma.

Gordon Myrick- Gordon is a concerned business leader from the coast. He spearheaded the meeting on the coast recently in an effort to raise awareness of the public. Sample letters to legislators and you were passed out at this meeting and the 500 or so people in attendance were encouraged to write letters as well as circulate a sample petition and send to your office. He feels you can correct this problem if you will make this a priority. He has made arrangements for us to meet in the auditorium or in a classroom at Bayou View Middle School since you will already be there.

Bridget Logan- Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse- Says that she has heard from DHS social workers on the coast that they are not taken referrals from the schools, etc. because they cannot investigate. If this is correct, the severe shortage of social workers is far worse than reflected in our numbers.

Legislators- Diane Peranich talked with Bill about introducing a bill to loosen the requirements to be a social worker. Many people on the coast feel this needs to be done to address the current crisis situation as a short-term fix. A long-term fix could be to get the association and DHS to identify what measures can be taken to expedite the hiring

process, partner so that the association can direct social workers toward DHS. There are schools of Social Work across the state and the association has many suggestions about how to resolve this problem. Deborah Dawkins also had a hearing about this issue several months ago and actually went into the local DHS office to volunteer her time working with them.

Brenda Scott- They are helping get the word out about the town meeting later in the day and would like to attend the meeting if you do not have a problem with it.

The National Social Worker Association, Mississippi Chapter- Their President is Karen Selestake and Janice Sandefur is the Executive Director. We met in October and tried repeatedly to meet with Janice. We had a meeting scheduled Monday with Thelma but she was out due to the death of her mother. We are re-scheduling the meeting ASAP. The representatives from the association said that they believe there are two options we need to consider. DHS needs to hire part-time or contract positions to address current crisis. Legislation passed last session prevents this, however. They have concerns about the hiring procedure at DHS, too. They said there is one person at the state office that reviews every application even if it is filled out at the Regional DHS Office. There are things that the State Personnel Board could do to expedite applications that are submitted at their office as well. There are 11 schools of social work in the state and 4,000 social workers in the state according to the assn. There is interest in working at DHS but the graduates are afraid due to talk of lay offs in other states and the current budget deficit at DHS. There is also liability concerns.

DHS/Thelma- She has had three meetings with PACT about this issue and she said this group was very adversarial. They asked a lot about the million dollars that you found to address the shortage and want to know why they have not seen any social workers hired with the money. You will get asked this question and we need to talk about how you need to respond. We also need to find out exactly what they were told by DHS staff.

Issue:

The Social Worker Association strongly opposes any legislation to loosen requirements for social workers or grandfather in other related professionals to do the social worker duties. The members of PACT and the attorney for the Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse are fighting for this and there is a lot of tension between the two groups.

Option:

The association may not be as opposed to this proposition if the legislation included language that anyone grandfathered in would do only case management or coordination duties on stable cases as opposed to investigations. Current law states that a licensed social worker is required to do investigations. Similar professionals being proposed would be people with counseling or psychology degree.

Issue:

Social Worker caseloads currently far exceed acceptable limits. The association recommends a caseload of 20-25 cases per social worker and the Child Welfare League recommends a caseload of 15 cases per social worker.

Option:

Mississippi is out of compliance and we must take action. Thelma needs to work with the association and PACT members so they can come to a resolution that everyone can agree on.

Issue:

The Department of Human Resources currently has a deficit of \$19 million for FY03 and lacks flexibility. We need to get this group to understand this is the direction we need to go instead of creating another layer of bureaucracy with a board.

Solution:

PACT, local legislators, advocates, and the public needs to demand that the legislature appropriate adequate funding for DHS. DHS also needs the flexibility to run the agency in a more efficient manner. They will not understand what this means so we'll need to explain how their budget is set up.

Issue:

Social Worker Salaries-

- The Social Worker Association representatives said that there is not a shortage of social workers in the state. The problem relates to salary and the hiring process at DHS.
- The PACT members contend that there is a shortage of social workers in the public and private arena. There are social worker ads running for months in the local paper on the coast.
- The State Personnel Board said the pay scale for DHS social workers in Mississippi is very comparable to surrounding states. The following are specific examples of how we compare:

Tennessee-	\$22,908
Louisiana-	\$23,004
Arkansas-	\$25,629
Alabama	\$25,641
AVERAGE:	\$25,680 (Surrounding States)
Mississippi	\$24,685

*** These are entry-level field staff salary quotes.**

As you can see, Mississippi is very comparable. The private sector pays around \$27,000.

After two years, the salary is increased to \$26,689 for Social Worker Senior.

After 3 more years experience, the salary is increased to \$29,459 for a Social Worker Advanced.

* If a Masters Level Social Worker applies for a position, the agency has the option to place them into a Social Worker Advanced position, or \$29,459.

SUMMARY: This issue is complicated and will require a short-term solution as well as a long-range plan. It will take all parties working together in order to protect the children of Harrison County as well as the rest of the state. If this meeting is public, there may be people from other counties. **Do you want the association invited to this meeting or have a separate meeting with them and DHS?**