

**April 24, 2020**

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in an Emergency Session on Friday, April 24, 2020, 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom of the Martin County Governmental Center, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, North Carolina.

## **ASSEMBLY**

Present in the Commissioners' Boardroom -- Chairman Tommy Bowen, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond, Jr., Commissioner Ronnie Smith, County Manager David Bone, Clerk to the Board Jessica Godard, Finance Director/Deputy Clerk Cindy Ange. Sheriff Tim Manning, Chief Deputy Drew Robinson, and DSS Director Letecia Loadholt were also present in the Boardroom.

Participating via conference call were Commissioner Elmo "Butch" Lilley and Commissioner Joe R. Ayers.

Chairman Bowen called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m. Vice Chairman Bond led the Pledge, and Commissioner Smith provided the invocation.

## **AGENDA APPROVAL**

Vice Chairman Bond made a MOTION to approve the agenda as presented, with a SECOND by Commissioner Lilley. The Board unanimously APPROVED the motion (5-0).

### **Consideration of COVID-19 Leave**

County Manager Bone stated there had been numerous conversations in recent days regarding the special circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 response. County Manager Bone stated there had been some challenging times, and staff had been adapting to changing needs on a daily basis. County Manager Bone spoke of specific concerns and challenges with the Department of Social Services. At this time, the courthouse was open to the public on an appointment only basis. This caused a significant decrease in the amount of foot traffic the workers were seeing. Additionally, many more tasks were being handled by mail, online, and by drop box services. County Manager Bone stated benefits renewals were being handled at the State level with an automated approval process (rather than local review) through the end of May 2020. All of these things significantly decreased workloads for clerical staff, as well as Income Maintenance Caseworkers.

DSS Director Letecia Loadholt was available to provide additional comments to the Board. Ms. Loadholt stated many programs in DSS were based on economic eligibility. Ms. Loadholt explained the eligibility process further and explained that with automatic renewals and recertification at the state level, the workload for many workers was decreased. There were many additional benefits that would continue through the month of May 2020, as well. Additionally, electric companies were not disconnecting services, causing a decrease in inquiries for the crisis program. There were still applications being received for food and nutrition services and children/family Medicaid, although some of the requirements had been relaxed.

Clerical staff had been mainly answering phones and completing other tasks such as filing, purging of old files, etc. County Manager Bone stated that a management challenge had come up with regards to being able to keep the staff productive. County Manager Bone stated an alternative plan had been discussed. It was suggested to have a two-week period (starting May 4, 2020) where

some emergency COVID-19 relief be provided for the clerical staff and income maintenance caseworker staff (21 employees) in DSS. The leave would be 40 hours of COVID-19 leave over the two-week period (week of 5/4/20 and 5/11/20).

Commissioner Smith asked Ms. Loadholt to clarify the state and federal funding associated with Medicaid and SNAP programs. Ms. Loadholt stated each program had a day sheet, which was used to document what services were provided over a 480-minute (8-hour) period. Reimbursements were based off these day sheets. For Medicaid, the reimbursement amount was 75%, and the rate for SNAP was 50%. Commissioner Smith wanted everyone to be aware that the County was not paying 100% of the salaries for these employees.

Commissioner Ayers stated whether the employees were at work and not completing tasks or on leave, the county would not be receiving those federal and state funds as was just mentioned. Commissioner Ayers stated his understanding from previous discussions was to let the employees come to work as scheduled and perform clerical and filing tasks to keep those employees at work. Commissioner Ayers felt this plan was extremely unfair, allowing 21 employees to work half-time and earn emergency leave, with no leave plan in place for the other 150+ employees of the County. Commissioner Ayers clarified he was not advocating for emergency leave for all employees. Commissioner Ayers stated his idea of how the situation would go would be for all employees to report to work as normal with no leave. Commissioner Ayers reiterated he felt the policy was extremely unfair, and he was extremely opposed to the plan.

Commissioner Smith made a MOTION to grant DSS staff, including Income Maintenance Caseworkers and clerical staff (21 employees) 40 hours of COVID-19 leave over a 2-week period (during the week of 5/4/2020 and 5/11/2020) and to re-evaluate the situation and any other situation in the county at the end of that period. Vice Chairman Bond SECONDED. The Board APPROVED the motion 4-1 (For: Chairman Bowen, Vice Chairman Bond, Commissioner Lilley, Commissioner Smith; Against: Commissioner Ayers). Commissioner Ayers addressed Clerk Godard and asked that the minutes reflected his opposition to this motion.

With no further business to discuss, Commissioner Smith made a MOTION to adjourn, with a SECOND from Vice Chairman Bond. Chairman Bowen adjourned the meeting at 3:19 p.m.

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Tommy Bowen, Chairman

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Jessica Godard, Clerk to the Board