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Subject: Fw: Greenville: Local DDSN Board dissolved

From: Bryan Kost
Sent: Wednesday, May 23, 2012 6:47:59 AM
To: Anthony Keck; Deirdra Singleton; John Supra; Roy Hess; Melanie Giese; Sam Waldrep; George Maky; Jan Polatty; Jeff Stensland; Jennifer Lynch; Laurel Eddins; January Stewart; Ana Lopez Defede
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Subject: Greenville: Local DDSN Board dissolved

"In a matter of minutes Tuesday, Greenville County Council dissolved the embattled board that runs the county's Disabilities and Special Needs agency and set up a framework for a new form of governance for the organization that serves approximately 2,200 people who rely on it for care"

Story:

The old guard has been swept away.

In a matter of minutes Tuesday, Greenville County Council dissolved the embattled board that runs the county's Disabilities and Special Needs agency and set up a framework for a new form of governance for the organization that serves approximately 2,200 people who rely on it for care.

The 120 or so family members at the meeting, who for weeks have packed council chambers to call for the ouster of the board, were overjoyed.

"I have to tell you I'm so happy I can't hold back the tears," said Peggy Farmer, 79, whose 60-year-old son is deaf and functions on the level of a 6- to 8-year-old child.

Details of the new structure remain to be determined.

The council will consider second reading of the ordinance on June 5, after the council hashes out requirements for service on the board and other measures designed to keep the agency operating as it should, County Council member Joe Dill said after the meeting.

The council didn't discuss the details of the emergency ordinance repealing the 1992 ordinance that created the current board structure or first reading of an ordinance calling for a new form of governance before unanimously approving both measures.

"All of us have ideas of what we'd like to see and what we think will work," Dill said.

He'd like to see the board consist of a mixture of business people, legal experts and people who are

knowledgeable about disabilities and what it takes to run such an organization.

The immediate plan, he said, was to get the state Department of Disabilities and Special Needs to take charge of the day-to-day operations of the agency, which has been beset with financial problems and accused of operating without allowing input from families.

State DDSN Director Beverly Buscemi told families at the meeting that the state is "very much willing to help."

"DDSN's focus remains unchanged, and that is focusing on the care and treatment, health, safety and welfare of the individuals that the Greenville Disability Board serves," she said.

That will be done "in such a way with good fiscal management and open communication with you as families and other stakeholders involved in this situation," she said.

"Tomorrow morning, DDSN management will be present at the board. We have a lot of work ahead of us," she said.

Later, she told GreenvilleOnline.com that it is premature to comment on the fate of the interim director of the local agency, Patrick Haddon, who was hired in February after the former director was fired.

"We'll be evaluating that situation and having meetings and making those decisions very shortly," she said.

A meeting to answer questions from families was scheduled for 6 p.m. May 30 at County Council chambers, she said.

Family members have complained that Haddon, whose background is in running a landscape business, is unqualified.

Haddon told GreenvilleOnline.com he's not sure what to expect.

"All I know is that I'll be showing up for work tomorrow, and I've got a day planned to continue making the proper changes we have to do around here for the clients," he said.

Board Chairwoman Roxie Kincannon, who has been criticized during a tumultuous period that saw the agency run a deficit of more than \$1.55 million and the resignation of seven of the 12 board members, couldn't be reached for comment.

The emergency ordinance, which went into effect immediately upon adoption, calls for the creation of a five-member interim board, which will be replaced by a permanent board after the number of members, terms and qualifications have been determined, said Joe Kernell, county administrator.

"I want to emphasize that the actions taken tonight directly impact the structure and existence of the board of directors itself," he said. "These actions do not affect the existence of the local agency or the services it provides.

"Citizens who rely on the board for care will not experience a disruption of services."

Families interrupted the 30-minute meeting several times with applause and could hardly contain their joy at hearing that the old board is disbanded.

"I feel relieved, happy, thankful," said Linda Fleenor, whose 26-year-old son Allen is a client of the agency. "With the county and the state behind us, I think we'll be good to go."

Pat Varner, whose 38-year-old son, Richie Lee, is a client, said she has confidence that the state agency will be able to run the local organization well until a new board is in place.

"They should be very competent," she said, "and they should be looking out for the overall welfare of our kids."

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