

## Human Services' 2017 budget 'pretty tight'

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JEFFERSON — Despite a \$186,321 increase in the tax levy for its proposed 2017 budget, the Jefferson County Human Services Department will have a “pretty tight” year.

During budget hearings on Wednesday, the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Finance Committee approved the Human Services Department's recommended budget, advancing it to the full county board.

The Finance Committee is recommending a countywide tax levy of \$27,068,827, of which \$1,134,343 is debt. The proposed levy represents an increase over \$26,743,522 this year.

Not included in the tax levy are funds of \$838,207 for the Jefferson County Health Department and \$1,070,311 for the county library system. Including the non-countywide funds, the total tax levy is \$28,977,348.

The proposed budget, if adopted, would result in a countywide property tax rate of \$4.2969 per \$1,000 equalized valuation, translating into a 3-cent-per-\$1,000 decrease from last year.

The Human Services Department's 2017 budget, the second-largest departmental portion of the budget, provides \$8,517,494 in tax levy funds. There is a total of \$312,603 in planned capital costs.

Capital projects include the purchase of a mini van, used truck and two fleet vehicles; replacing shifted sidewalks, existing floors, roofing for the Health and Human Services building; and undertaking information systems projects.

A majority of increase in expenses for personnel, representing a \$550,435 increase, and operating costs, a \$479,159 increase, will be covered by federal and state funding and public charges.

“I think, overall, this budget is doable, but it's a pretty tight year for us,” Kathi Cauley, Human Services director, said. “It's always a game of chance. We know the state numbers through June 30, 2017, because that's how the state budget runs. We don't know what the state budget is after that, so there's some projections in (the budget) and there's some hard and fast numbers.

“We base our budget on the expenditures that we're seeing and trends for the first six months of the year, (but) we don't know that that always continues that way,” she added. “(The Finance Committee) needs numbers for our budget before we get numbers from the state, so some of our contracts from the state, some of allocations, we don't find out until later.”

Cauley said there are two big areas of risk for the department: hospitalizations and child alternate care.

“Our mental health calls are up. Back in 2014, we had 6,000 calls for the full year,” she explained. “At the end of August, we’ve had over 6,000 already this year. So we’ll potentially hit 10,000 emergency phone calls. A lot of those are related to substance abuse now, like heroin and opioids, but also suicide calls are up this year and, unfortunately, suicides in the county are up.”

Human Services is responsible for emergency detentions when there is a crisis.

“That’s a little out of our control,” Cauley said. “We’ve recognized some great savings in the area over the years by adding more contracts with what is referred to as general hospitals that have inpatient psychiatric units. When we’re able to use those hospitals, insurance covers the cost. But when we have to go to one of the state facilities, like Winnebago Mental Health Institute, that is always tax levy.”

Hospital rates also are out of the department’s control, she said.

“Winnebago Mental Health Institute — where we go when an emergency ensues and there is no option in the general hospital, either because of bed availability or because of the acuity of the situation — the cost is \$1,200 a day, plus different add-ons,” Cauley explained. “So if someone needed more staff, there’s a cost for that. If someone needs medical attention, there’s a cost for that. It’s a very expensive setting.”

She was quick to point out that, regardless of rates, the facilities are a resource for Human Services that the department maintains a close partnership with and that the facilities “do good things.”

“The other big risk area is always child alternate care,” Cauley said. “While we have less children overall right now in child alternate care — we have about 56 and a few years ago we had close to 100 — the problem is we see children with very, very complex trauma issues. So some of those 56 children that need care, need the more expensive kind of care.”

Cauley is requesting several staff changes in the 2017 budget.

It was proposed to add two Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) service facilitators (funded by Medicaid); support staff for CCS (funded by Medicaid); support staff for Children Long-Term Support (CLTS) (funded by Medicaid); a lead economic support position (funded with federal, state and county dollars); an economic support position, recruiting for someone who is bilingual (funded with federal, state and county dollars); and splitting a compliance/IT position into a compliance officer and an IT liaison (both funded by Medicaid rates, state and federal allocations and tax levy).

“The compliance officer is a really key position for us,” Cauley said. “We have billed more and that means billing more of our Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance. For example, in our clinic area, the revenue has almost tripled in the last few years. But that also brings more audits and CMS, the center for Medicaid and Medicare, has a lot more audits rolling out in October, so we have to have a really strong compliance program. We really need that compliance officer.”

Also on Wednesday were budget hearings for the Health Department and Child Support. Both proposed budgets were approved by the Finance Committee.

### Health Department

The recommended 2017 Health Department budget calls for \$838,207 in tax levy funds, which is the same as the 2016 adopted budget.

The Health Department has a separate fund balance because it is non-countywide tax levy.

The fund balance of \$130,199, which will be used for operations, will be utilized by the department.

In 2015, the Health Department had a balance of \$240,164 in unassigned fund balance above the three-month goal in the Fund Balance Policy. In the 2017 budget, the use of \$130,199 will bring that balance down to an estimated \$109,965. The Finance Committee approved going above the three-month fund balance policy to be utilized in future years.

“We have this fund balance that mainly came out of us having the Personal Care Program,” Gail Scott, Health Department director, said. “In the past, the Personal Care Program did make enough money, so that we almost didn’t need tax levy. What we did is, we did all the billing in the county for all personal care and then we kept a percentage of that for administrative costs. We also did provide personal care through contracts with staffing agencies.”

No capital items are proposed.

### Child Support

Child Support’s recommended 2017 budget provides \$158,947 in tax levy, which is a \$7,572 decrease in levy from the 2016 adopted budget. No capital items are proposed.

Jefferson County budget hearings continued today at 8:30 a.m.