

Letters to the Editor

Your opinion is valued

Dear Editor,

The Sibley County Public Health Department has been protecting the residents of Sibley County for decades through a strong partnership with Meeker and McLeod Counties. MN Statute 145A puts requirements in place for Community Health Boards (CHBs), which are required to perform certain functions and services of public health in order to assure health and safety of Minnesota residents. In 1980, the County Board members of Meeker, McLeod and Sibley entered into a joint powers agreement forming Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services (CHS). A delegation agreement was put into place that delegates duties from the CHS to member counties. Basically, this means money comes into the CHS and then is allocated to each of the counties.

Over the years, there have been significant budget cuts to public health funding, as well as revisions to MN Statute 145A requiring more work and reporting of CHBs. Over the past decade Sibley County Public Health Department has dwindled to a few nurses and public health professionals. Because of this decline in staff, several programs are no longer offered i.e. School Health and Home Care to name a couple. To address the issues of less funding and more work, staff in Meeker, McLeod, Sibley started to work together in order to be more efficient and cost effective. The grants and the majority of funding sources are integrated as a three county, but counties still hire staff independently to complete duties and responsibilities.

On Oct 12th, 2017 the CHB had an opportunity to save money and increase

public health services to the residents of Sibley County and would create a stronger infrastructure for years to come.

Staff would have been restructured allowing staff to offer more WIC clinic hours, offer more home visits, offer more car seat appointments, and other services. Face to face services at the individual counties will not change and will in fact be increased. Also, county commissioners have used the term "integration" when stating "this has already been done with our Public Health and Human Services," however, it was a merge between Public Health and Human Services whereas clerical and fiscal are shared. Full integration between departments cannot be done, because the two are not interchangeable. We cannot have social workers doing nursing duties and vice versa.

While the governing authority for public health programs and services is already with the CHB, the joint powers agreement requires individual county approval if there is a monetary contribution to the CHB.

If full integration does not happen, Meeker and McLeod counties will no longer provide staff to fill gaps at Sibley County. I urge you to contact your county commissioners and support integration. This is a win-win for our county.

Sincerely,
Jane Bruns

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