

Johnson County Sun article – March 10, 2010

## Once again, county directors prepare for the worst

WRITTEN BY CHUCK KURTZ

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Talk about déjà vu for Johnson County department heads: same budget woes, different year.

Only worse.

“Yes,” **Maury Thompson**, director of Developmental Services said, “different year, worse story.”

Just like last year, Thompson and others are in the preliminary stages of preparing their 2011 budgets by planning for the worst and hoping for the best.

“That’s exactly where we’re at again,” **Debbie Collins**, director of Human Services and Aging, said. “We just seem to keep getting bad news and more bad news.”

A large portion of those 2011 budgets will be determined by what lawmakers do in Topeka regarding the state’s budget. What the state does with Medicaid payments is a concern, Thompson and Collins said.

In November, Gov. **Mark Parkinson** reduced Medicaid payments by 10 percent to help offset a shortfall in the 2010 budget. In its rescission bill, which Parkinson is expected to sign, legislators reversed that reduction.

“The Medicaid rate reduction would be eliminated retroactively to Jan. 1,” Thompson said. “So that’s some relief and some good news on the Medicaid side.”

Collins said nothing will be final with Medicaid in the 2011 budget until the end of the legislative session. Until then, she is making plans to reduce services and said she is anticipating having to put clients on a waiting list for services.

“We’re not entirely sure how Medicaid rates are going to be impacted right now,” she said. “We’re still waiting to see what happens with our aging program; we’re not sure what’s going to happen with nutrition.

“I wish I had better news and something more concrete that I could share, but we’re still just in that holding pattern until we see what the Legislature does, and we won’t know what the county commissioners are going to do until they have had a chance to look over the budget, and they haven’t been given anything specific yet.”

The reduced funding coupled with increased emergency needs already has forced Collins to eliminate some services, the most visible being the county’s holiday assistance program.

“Our last year for that was 2009,” she said. “We’ve had a big increase in foot traffic in our multi-service centers and in lieu of just being able to provide the emergency needs of those people who walk through the door we had to give up something, and that was the holiday assistance program.”

She said her department is working with community partners to help fill that void.

In 2008, the multi-service centers helped 1,960 first-time households. That number increased to 2,338 in 2009. And it continues to increase, she said.

"I don't have (January and February) figures yet, but anecdotally I can tell you yes it continues to increase. I've heard from my staff that they are continuing to get a steady stream of people in the doors that have never had to seek services before," Collins said.

The funding news isn't any better for Thompson. Developmental Services began fiscal 2010 with \$1.1 million. That has since been reduced to \$285,000.

"The people side of that equation, which is the more important piece, is that we were supporting 201 families in Johnson County on a program the state calls Family Subsidy," he said. "But now, because of those funding reductions, we are now down to 44 families of the 201 that are still on the program, and that is 44 families that we will have the funding to serve beginning July 1 if no other reductions are in place."

Parkinson is seeking another \$1.3 million reduction of funds targeted for the state's developmental services programs in his proposed 2011 budget.

Thompson said that kind of a cut could be devastating to programs and clients.

"We've had a hiring freeze at the county since Dec. 18, 2008, and we've continued to ask employees to get the job done while we have the hiring freeze in place," he said. "People need to know that services for county residents with developmental disabilities are very much in jeopardy, and if that's of concern or interest to them they need to be letting their legislators know their feelings."