

APPROPRIATIONS - FINANCE & CLAIMS

SUB-COMMITTEE: HUMAN SERVICES

FEBRUARY 7, 1979 - CAPITOL ANNEX

The meeting was called to order at 8:10 a.m. by Chairman Steve Waldron with the following members present:

Chairman Steve Waldron
Representative Bill Hand
Representative Robert Marks
Senator Pat Regan
Senator Pete Story

Senator Gary Aklestad - excused

Others present were: Jack Carver, Helena Coalition for Handicapped; Linda Gamble, OBPP; Ron Weiss, OBPP; Ron Brown, Administrator of Centralized Services of SRS; Earl Vermillion, Veteran's Affairs Division; William Hikkinen, American Legion; David Armstrong, Administrator of Veteran's Affairs Division; John E. Grauman, Billings Veteran's Affairs Division; Tom Mahan; Representative Budd Gould; Bob Durkee, VFW; John E. Sloan, DAV; Keith Colbo, Director of SRS; Ben F. Johns, Deputy Director of the Office of Administration of SRS and Curt Nichols, LFA.

ADMINISTRATION & SUPPORT SERVICES

This is the centralized services of SRS. They handle the overall agency management, budgeting, fiscal services, personnel and data processing.

The LFA recommends deleting five field supervisors. The Executive Budget does not delete these positions; they do recommend adding ten auditors. Ron Weiss, OBPP, agrees with Curt Nichols on budget differences.

Keith Colbo, Director of SRS, explained that the five field supervisors were of tremendous value in staff management in the agency. He pointed out that there were 760 employees throughout the state, which included both county and state employees, and the supervisors are necessary. Helena based supervisors are just not able to oversee all of the problems. The problems, he felt, were better solved in the field.

The chairman expressed concern that there were too many administrative positions in this agency. Mr. Colbo responded by saying that all the supervisors were necessary. The field supervisors deal with such problems as contesting of foster

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care licensing among other things. There is not daily contact with the supervisors, but they do submit written reports.

Mr. Colbo justified the ten additional auditors by saying it would improve their audits. Also it is in response to the Fiscal Analysts' allegations that the auditors were not getting the audits done in a timely fashion. They now have eight auditors, two of which have just started this year, one chief and one secretary. Mr. Colbo explained that two of the auditors also act as assistant supervisors; but they also do audits. These auditors also assist in training new auditors.

Ron Brown, Administrator of Centralized Services, also explained that nursing home audits used to take three days, but because of new federal regulations they now take about two weeks. The chairman questioned Mr. Brown on the uniform system of accounts that was suppose to be set up for nursing homes. At this time it has not been done, but it is something to strive for. Mr. Brown also pointed out a problem with hiring auditors. They must compete with other state agencies which can offer higher starting pay.

Mr. Brown was asked what the researchers do in this service. The researchers are responsible for gathering the information necessary for the program.

The MIMS data programing was discussed. Funding was appropriated last session, however the system is still not working. The funds have not been used and need to be transferred forward. The SS system they are using now is very inadequate and does not provide the information needed. The fiscal analysts have expressed concern that the present staff on data processing is not qualified or capable of implementing the new MIMs system. Mr. Colbo recognized this as a problem, but felt that as the need requires he could restaff.

Mr. Colbo was questioned on the agency's publications. They have four: a yearly publication called Child Abuse and Negligence which will not be printed again this year, a booklet for home attendants, an employee's handbook and the State Plan.

Representative Budd Gould spoke on behalf of the field representatives. He said they were hard workers and were badly needed.

Jack Carver, Helena Coalition for the Handicapped, also spoke on behalf of the field representatives. He explained that they do send in monthly reports to their supervisors. He felt they did a worthwhile service for handicapped persons.

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VETERAN'S AFFAIR DIVISION

This division is responsible for assisting veterans to apply for benefits which they are entitled to with the Veteran's Administration. This includes instructing veterans or their dependants on what is needed to apply, help with forms and appealing decisions if necessary.

The fiscal analyst recommended cutting two part-time secretaries who are contracted out for the DAV and the VFW. He felt they were not beneficial to the Veteran's Affairs Program. He also recommended increasing the travel funding as they did not have sufficient funds to travel with last year. Mr. Armstrong pointed out that increases in rent or telephone services come out of the travel fund because it is the only flexible account.

Ron Weiss, the Executive Budget Officer, recommended giving the program so much money and letting them decide if they wanted to contract out the secretaries. He also added that the Executive Budget left the travel at the same level as in 1978. They did not take the Governor's recommended 15% cut.

Dave Armstrong, Administrator for Veteran's Affairs, spoke on behalf of the program. His program has asked for full funding including a 6% increase. They are also asking for one additional person to be located in the Billings Office. They now have offices in Wolf Point, Great Falls with two post officers, Havre, Billings, Kalispell, Missoula, Helena with 4.5 FTEs, Miles City, Bozeman and Butte. In 1978 they served over forty-four thousand veterans or their dependants and they hold almost forty-five thousand Power of Attorneys. The bureau is required to take vacancy savings next fiscal year. There is not much turn over in this department and if a position does not open by next July, they will have to lay someone off. They also have 9.5 clerical positions. Mr. Armstrong felt these secretaries were necessary as they run the offices when the post officers are out in the field. He also pointed out that the federal government does not provide any field assistance. He noted that the number of veterans is not decreasing. As the veterans become older many of them will apply for relief.

Senator Regan questioned Mr. Armstrong on whether the VFW and the DAV did the same job as the Veteran's Affairs Division. Mr. Armstrong replied that they do assist people with claims; however, they are not as familiar with the regulations and often refer the individual to the Veteran's Affairs Division.

The two part-time secretaries were discussed. It was felt by the chairman and fiscal analyst that the contracts were very vague and did not specify the jobs to be done. They do aid with forms and regular secretarial work. Mr. John E. Grauman from the Billings Office of Veteran's Affairs informed the subcommittee that these secretaries were paid below the minimum wages. He also felt the contracts were not proper and he has fought them all along.

Mr. Colbo did explain that \$7,600 was split between the two secretaries. The chairman requested a copy of the contract for the subcommittee plus a letter from Mr. Colbo explaining what the department intended to do about the contract.

Senator Regan expressed concern that we have a federal program for veterans, plus another statewide program just to get the federal funds. She requested the fiscal analyst to investigate how other states handle this matter.

Senator Story pointed out that the program has remained at a level status and that these veterans have "paid their dues".

John Sloan, DAV, spoke on behalf of the program. The DAV holds approximately seventeen thousand Power of Attorneys. They aid applicants with claims to obtain funds from the VA.

Bob Durkee, VFW, spoke on his program. The VFW has over 90 posts throughout the state with volunteer post officers. Besides aiding in claims they also try to find veterans and inform them on the programs available. They also have post officers in Washington, D.C. to aid with claim appeals. The American Legion has 122 posts.

The only tie between the VFW and DAV with the Veteran's Affairs is the two contracted secretaries which the Veteran's Affairs provide funds.

It was questioned whether Veterans Affairs could contract out to the non-profit organizations. Mr. Armstrong felt that the volunteer post officers did not have the expertise to aid the people properly. Attorneys under Title 38 can only charge ten dollars to aid an individual with a veteran's claim and many refuse to do them.

Bill Kikkinen, who recently retired from the Missoula Veteran's Affairs Office, spoke on behalf of the program. He felt the secretaries were necessary. He felt they could do the same work as the post officers, however the post officer must be a veteran. He did not think the people would get the proper services if they were contracted out.

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Mr. Grauman stated that he didn't feel the state should be picking up the whole tab for these services. He felt federal money was available especially for those veterans who have problems with drugs, alcohol and crime. He felt the federal government should also provide a domiciliary for the vets.

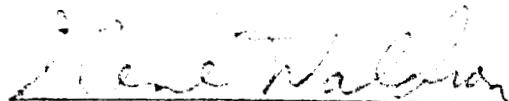
Tom Mahan an individual with interests in both the DAV and the VFW spoke on the programs. He explained that at one time the secretaries within the DAV and VFW were regular state employees. They were taken away. The Legislature then line itemed the secretaries in a budget. This was not legal. The services were then contracted out. He pointed out that the Veteran's Affairs helped the veterans obtain the proof they need to file claims and appeals.

Chairman Waldron appointed a subcommittee of the subcommittee to finish the hearing.

It was questioned if the secretaries could be funded some other way than by contract. That is one option the subcommittee may consider.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Steve Waldron, Chairman
Approved