

BUSINESS SESSION: THURSDAY, MAY 12, 2022, 10:00 A.M.

Location: Commissioners Meeting Room, Basement.

**Public meetings are being held both in-person and by conference call. To participate in the meeting please dial 1-408-419-1715 or 1-408-915-6290 and enter meeting number 2468097683#*

Call to Order:

Commissioner Erb called the meeting to order.

Moment of Silent Reflection:

Commissioner Erb called for a moment of silent reflection.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag:

Commissioner Erb requested that those attending the meeting please stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Roll Call:

Members Present:

Commissioner Erb, Commissioner Burke, Commissioner Webster and Chief Clerk Hemminger.

Members Absent:

Solicitor Karn and Assistant Solicitor Muriceak.

Others Present:

Allison Senkevich and Melissa Harpster (Commissioner's Office), Theresa Rudy and Jim Hudack (Social Services) and Kay Stephens (Altoona Mirror).

Public Comment:

Commissioner Erb called for public comment. **There were no comments noted.**

Special Presentation on CCAP 2022 Priorities Toolkit:

Appropriate Funding To Support the Mental Health System

Commissioner Erb provided the following CCAP 2022 Priorities Toolkit presentation:

The Board of Commissioners will be taking a few moments at the beginning of some of our meetings over the next 6 weeks to discuss the 2022 County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania legislative priorities.

CCAP's top priority for the year is to garner appropriate funding to support the crumbling mental health system.

Last week we adopted a proclamation marking May as Mental Health Awareness Month. And the more awareness people gain, the more concerned they become.

I cannot overstate the necessity and urgency of increasing state support for county mental health services to stave off the collapse of a core part of the Commonwealth's mental health system.

The Commonwealth has not invested new funding in these services in well over a decade.

While the crisis has been building for years, the COVID-19 pandemic served to accelerate and deepen the negative impact of inadequate funding.

Since 2009, that funding has remained flat, and this level funding, coupled with the impact of inflation, is having a devastating impact on the ability of counties to sustain these needed behavioral health services.

Level funding over the past decade translates into an inflation-adjusted reduction of over 25%. And that does not even include the 10% funding cut back in 2012.

The lack of adequate funding is well documented, and ongoing demand for mental health services has grown significantly due to COVID.

We see the devastating adverse effects every day here in Blair County.

You need look no further than the steady increase in incarcerations of individuals suffering from untreated behavioral health conditions that have led to making our prison the largest mental health treatment facility in the county.

Needless to say, our county prison is ill equipped and staffed to be the largest mental health treatment facility.

Another striking example is the well-publicized overcrowding in the UPMC Altoona emergency department that is severely exacerbated because of the lack of alternative treatment and diversion for those suffering from mental health occurrences.

We are fortunate and grateful that our County Mental Health office in cooperation with UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital and UPMC Western Behavioral Health of the Alleghenies was able to achieve grants that will expand our Mobile Crisis Services and Student Assistance Programs.

But those grant funds will in time expire, and we need to be able to sustain these essential services when that happens.

As we step back and look at the bigger picture, it becomes clear that increased funding for the county mental health systems can actually provide for cost savings in the Commonwealth's and the County's budget.

It would allow for prevention and treatment when and where people need it most and help prevent individuals from ending up in emergency departments, needing law enforcement response, or facing potential incarceration.

Without strong support from and partnership with the Commonwealth to provide the funding to meet the ever-increasing needs for mental health services, the additional and heavier costs will ultimately be fall to the taxpayers in far greater amounts.

I think it is important to recognize that Blair County government has been able to keep costs down in part by our participation in the Behavioral HealthChoices program through Blair HealthChoices, with whom we had our annual meeting last month.

Their supporting mental health efforts in the county prison with a full-time forensic case manager is a perfect example of the added value HealthChoices brings to Blair County government.

But certain legislators have called for the dismantling of that program which would have devastating effects on the over 30,000 county residents covered by it.

It is critically important that the General Assembly preserve Behavioral HealthChoices so that counties like ours can continue to provide local mental health services effectively and efficiently to our Medicaid-eligible population.

In his fiscal year 22-23 budget, Gov. Wolf proposed \$36.6 million in additional funding for the mental health base, which if adopted by the General Assembly, will bring funding levels back to 2/3's of what they were 11 years ago.

While this does not fully meet the need, I applaud Gov. Wolf's efforts and ask our state legislators to support this increase.

The mental health community base needs a targeted, strategic investment of Commonwealth dollars to stabilize and strengthen community crisis services, residential mental health programs, and other locally provided care.

Additionally, counties need the assurance of annually increased investments in the mental health community base to fortify the existing safety net of services.

The need is pressing; the funds are there, the time for action is now.

Proclamation:

National Corrections Officers & Employees Week May 1 thru 7, 2022.

Commissioner Webster read the following proclamation proclaiming May 1 through 7, 2022 National Corrections Officers & Employees Week and motioned for adoption of the proclamation:

**PROCLAMATION
National Corrections Officers and Employees Week, May 1 – May 7, 2022**

WHEREAS, correctional officers are trained law enforcement professionals dedicated to maintaining safe correctional facilities and ensuring public safety; and

WHEREAS, correctional facilities across the U.S., both civilian and military, public and private, adult and juvenile, are run by highly qualified and experienced individuals with a deep understanding of the challenges within the profession; and

WHEREAS, correctional officers and employees are responsible for the custody, care and rehabilitation of thousands of offenders every year, as well as the maintenance of safe and secure facilities; and

WHEREAS, correctional officers and employees serve admirably in many different capacities, including jail administrators, wardens, chaplains, nurses, supervisors, social workers, teachers, managers and directors; and

WHEREAS, correctional officers and employees teach, train, mentor, counsel and treat thousands of offenders and provide offenders with direction, hope and a new focus while assisting with reentry and life outside corrections; and

WHEREAS, although each of these dedicated professionals works in a different field and specializes in a specific area, all are committed to a common goal: the secure, safe and humane operation of our Commonwealth's correctional facilities; and

NOW, THEREFORE, we, the Blair County Board of Commissioners do hereby proclaim the week of May 1 – 7, 2022 Corrections Officers and Employees Week in Blair County, and encourage the residents of the Blair County to recognize the vital role these dedicated professionals play in ensuring the effective operation of our correctional system in the interest of public safety.

DULY, adopted by the Commissioners of the County of Blair, Pennsylvania, this 10th day of May 2022.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt the proclamation.

Unfinished Business:

Adoption of Resolutions:

Resolution 162-2022: A resolution approving a proposal of service contract between the County of Blair and Keller Engineers for surveying the Leonard Burket Estate Home Farm easement area, located in Huston Township, Blair County, in the lump sum total of \$4,600.00.

Motion by Commissioner Erb, seconded by Commissioner Webster and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 162-2022.

Resolution 163-2022: A resolution approving an Affordable Housing Trust Fund Program Disbursement, in the total amount of \$3,000.00, for the purchase of property at 2813 Oak Avenue, Altoona, PA by Tolulope Oluwade.

Motion by Commissioner Erb, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 163-2022.

Resolution 164-2022: A resolution approving a Training Membership Program Contract between the County of Blair, Emergency Management Agency and Bucks County Community College, Department of Public Safety Training and Certification, in an amount not to exceed \$1,200.00, for 200 teaching hours of required training to EMA, 911 and county employees, as well as local emergency coordinators, police, fire, EMS and volunteers for the period of January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. The Hazardous Materials Response Fund Grant (HMRF) will pay said contract.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 164-2022.

Resolution 165-2022: A resolution approving two-2 Facility Event Agreements between the County of Blair, on behalf of the Tax Claim Bureau and the Blair County Convention Center for 1) the use of Ballroom 3, to conduct the Judicial Tax Sale on June 15, 2022, at the rate of \$500.00; and 2) the use of Exhibit Hall F-H, to conduct the 2022 Upset Sale on September 21, 2022, at the rate of \$500.00.

Motion by Commissioner Burke, seconded by Commissioner Webster and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 165-2022.

Resolution 166-2022: A resolution approving authorization for Keller Engineers and the Blair County Conservation District to prepare a General Permit for the replacement of a small pedestrian bridge at Valley View Park.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 166-2022.

Resolution 167-2022: A resolution approving the Blair County Park and Recreation Advisory Board to solicit quotes for the removal of trees and their stumps identified as hazardous at Valley View Park.

Motion by Commissioner Webster, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 167-2022.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

None

Adjourn:

Meeting Adjourned,

Nicole M. Hemminger, Chief Clerk