

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

The taxpayer has finally been told that the Humboldt County Mental Health Department is in trouble. Resignations of doctors and nurses have placed the organization in a crisis situation with complaints of job stress, low morale, burnout among existing staff, and poor management communication. Complaints also include the demands placed on the inpatient psychiatric hospital staff and that potentially dangerous patients outweigh the present salaries. All of this was addressed through a letter from two of the resigning doctors. For how long and why has this crises situation been building? It is common knowledge that there is a shortage of physicians within our county due to its rural nature and recruitment is difficult but it still does not add up as to the reason why the Mental Health Department has decayed to the present level. This forces one to take a look at those responsible for the overall operation. That responsibility rests with a number of high paid administrators, including the Director of Health and Human Services and ultimately with the Board of Supervisors. There is mention of improved communications between medical staff and administrators with weekly meetings being held. If these meetings have been taking place over a long period of time, what was discussed, the price of eggs? The administrators say the police leave too many drunk and drugged people at the mental facility rather than taking them to appropriate treatment facilities. Since when has a police officer been required to psychoanalyze behavior? Don't place the blame on the police! There is now a pending investigation regarding the June Fourteen death of a jail inmate whose family claims that the arresting officers should have recognized the suspect's schizophrenic disability and taken him to the emergency room. So what is a cop supposed to do? The resigning doctors' letter also mentioned the possibility of increases in crime. That sparks the question; how much has crime increased during the time the mental health department problem has existed? This crisis is most serious and reaches every corner of the county. It appears that there are four DHHS administrators that are directly involved in the situation. Their annual combined salary, including benefits, is in the neighborhood of Seven Hundred Twelve Thousand dollars almost three quarters of a million, a big investment with little return. It is interesting to note that our County Board of Supervisors has approved a pay raise for our Sheriff, an elected position. The increase in salary is Nineteen Thousand Five Hundred dollars annually, including benefits, due to the recent added responsibility of Coroner/Administrator. In a period of two years, the annual salary, including benefits, for the Department of Health and Human Services Public Education and Information Officer jumped from Sixty Eight Thousand Nine Hundred Dollars to Ninety Three Thousand Seven Hundred dollars. That is an increase of Twenty Four Thousand Eight Hundred dollars. Who authorized such a jump and why?

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