

# HardisonInk.com

## Commission votes 4-1 for mental health study



**Meridian Behavioral Healthcare Vice President of Forensic Services Leah Vail Compton speaks to the Levy County Commission on Tuesday morning (Dec. 19).**

### Story and Photo

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 21, 2017 at 3:17 p.m.**

**BRONSON** -- The Florida Department of Children and Families might award a matching grant to Levy County so that Meridian Behavioral Healthcare Inc. (MBHI) can add a staff member to conduct research, according to information shared by MBHI Vice President of Forensic Services Leah Vail Compton on Tuesday morning (Dec. 19).

By a 4-1 vote, the Levy County Commission agreed to write a letter of support, although there is a caveat of the county's match being in-kind rather than cash for the planning part of this grant.

Interestingly, among the information in the 42 pages of material the County Commission members were given in regard to this request shows that although "A cash match is not required for Planning Grant Applicants," there are other cash match requirements for the program once it starts.

The Florida Department of Children and Families Criminal Justice, Mental Health, And Substance Abuse Reinvestment Grant application solicitation notes that "Grantee match is that portion of project property and services (staff time, fringe benefits, supplies, equipment, travel, rent etc.) coming from other than State funds.

"The matching share must constitute 100 percent of the grant amount," the form notes. "For Implementation/Expansion Grant Applicants, a cash match of 5 percent in the first Program year, 10 percent in the second Program year, and 15 percent in the third Program year is required; and the remaining balance for each Program year may be in-kind."

The match may be derived from the county or private sources, the grant application's pre-application information notes. Both cash contributions (provided directly by the grantee) and "in-kind" contributions (from a third party) may be utilized to satisfy the match requirement.

On Tuesday night, Commissioner Brooks said he voted "No" on Tuesday morning because he heard there are 125 people in Alachua County that are being helped by this program.

The population of Alachua County in 2016 was about 263,500, according to United States Census records. Brooks said this is not a very big part of the population of that county.

As far as numbers, Compton said this planning grant is "small" -- being about \$100,000 to \$125,000.

This grant would be to conduct research to find numbers of people who may be helped with mental health care as a method of jail diversion, according to what was said. Compton noted that the return on investment for prevention in regard to crimes originating from mental health issues has been proved to be efficient and cost-worthy.

On Tuesday night, Brooks said he did not see a return on investment when there are 125 people helped out of a population in the 250,000 range. The request for a letter of endorsement for research to see if the county wanted to apply for a match grant, Brooks said, was not supported enough for him at that point Tuesday morning for him to vote in favor of it. He did ask Compton for information for future reference.

During her speaking session on Tuesday morning, Compton said Levy County already is in the process of

# HardisonInk.com

---

creating a Mental Health Court to assist the judicial system with mental illness that contributes to drug abuse in Levy County.

Compton received the 4-1 vote for Meridian Behavioral Health Inc. to seek money from the Florida Department of Children and Families to conduct research and plan for possible implementation of a court-diversion mental health program.

Linda Cooper, a Levy County resident who is relatively vocal about government spending tax dollars, questioned the value of the planning of implementation of a program in contrast with simply implementing it.

Compton explained to Cooper that the process for this program to become established in Levy County will be as it was for the program that became established in Alachua County. Bradford County has linked with the Alachua County program, Compton said, but this grant would be for a sole Levy County program if it is ever implemented.

Commissioner Lilly Rooks asked Compton what was being requested of the County Commission in regard to the text of the letter to be sent to Department of Children and Families Procurement Manager Michele Staffieri in Tallahassee.

Compton said a copy of a suggested letter is among the 40-plus pages of material she submitted to be placed on the agenda to speak Tuesday morning. And it is in the “book” for commissioners’ review.

That letter noted in part, “that the Levy County Board of County Commissioners acted on Dec. 19, 2017 to approve a motion which authorizes Meridian Behavioral Healthcare Inc. to act specifically in the capacity of applicant agency on behalf of Levy County under the identified CJMHSA Reinvestment Grant Request for Applications prepared by the Department of Children and Families.

“We recognize that Meridian is a well-established community provider agency with extensive experience in the grant application and grant administrative processes required under the CJMHSA Reinvestment Grant Program,” the form letter continued. “This has been evident through the organization's delivery of such services to Alachua County with current and previous CJMHSA Reinvestment Grants received by Alachua County. The Levy County Board of County Commissioners therefore fully endorses providing this capacity to Meridian.”

Chairman John Meeks noted that County Attorney Anne Bast Brown might modify the letter if she sees a need for modifying the support letter.

Meridian Behavioral Healthcare Inc. notes on its website that its mission is “To promote the health, recovery, and well-being of those affected by mental illnesses and substance use disorders through prevention, coordinated treatment, and supportive services.”

The vision for Meridian is that “Hope, Recovery and Wellness are within everyone’s reach.”

The priorities of Meridian are “... to bring education about mental illnesses and substance use disorders and treatment of those affected to the local level.”

As for the Mental Health Court and the future possible program, the process has started in Levy County.

The Florida Department of Children and Families might be giving Levy County some added help due to this county’s impoverished status.

Almost half of Florida’s 67 counties are listed as economically constrained counties recognized by the state government in Florida, according to records.

The poor counties are Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties, and Baker, Bradford, Calhoun, Columbia, DeSoto, Franklin, Gadsden, Glades, Gulf, Hamilton, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Liberty, Madison, Okeechobee, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Wakulla and Washington counties.