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As ratings slide, Hackel blasts raise for Macomb County Martha T. Berry boss

Human Services Board chair says salary is meant to attract future quality candidates

By Mitch Hotts, The Macomb Daily

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Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel is blasting the team overseeing the county's elderly care center for providing a double-digit pay raise to the top administrator when the facility has the lowest quality rating among similar public facilities in the state.

He also takes exception to the hospital's overseers for taking steps to keep their actions out of public view, a charge the body's chairman denies.

In two strongly-worded letters addressed to the Macomb County Board of Commissioners, Hackel says the chairman of a three-person panel in charge of [Martha T. Berry Medical Care Facility](#) "misrepresented" information to the board about raises for the top administrator. The letters were obtained by The Macomb Daily under the Freedom of Information Act.

The county exec charges Human Services Board Chairman Roger Facione with "dishonesty and selective disclosure" over how he presented details to the county board.

"All we ask for on behalf of the public is open transparency, the same thing you see from other bodies and agencies in Macomb County," wrote Hackel.

At issue is an updated compensation package for Jennifer Morgan, the executive director of Martha T. Berry Medical Care Facility, and how it was arrived at.

Morgan was paid a salary of \$110,920 when she was first hired in Macomb in 2010. She formerly served as administrator of the Samaritan Manor, a 120-bed long-term center at Detroit Mercy Hospital.

But the Human Services Board, a three-member panel that oversees Martha T. Berry, in 2015 approved a revised salary of \$120,600. Morgan also received a compensation package that includes expense reimbursements, extra cash compensation and non-approved retroactivity and severance pay totalling \$12,200.

Morgan's contract made the salary adjustment retroactive to 2014 and the compensation package retroactive to January 2015.

Her salary is now \$128,600, and with step raises she will reach the top of her pay range at \$145,600 in 2017. With the \$12,200 additional compensation, she will make \$160,000 -- more than the two physicians serving as medical directors at Martha T. Berry.

Morgan could not be reached for comment.

“Jennifer’s initial pay scale peaked out at \$120,606, but when her new contract was approved, it bumped her peak to \$146,600,” said Deputy County Executive Al Lorenzo. “Our concern was the lack of transparency. The meeting where this was approved at, there were no minutes available to the public. When Mark wrote those letters to the county board, it prompted an immediate response.”

Facione said Morgan’s pay was adjusted upward because she was the lowest paid director in a survey of other administrators in the state with 200 or more beds. In addition, Facione added the salary needed to be elevated to attract quality candidates in the future after Morgan leaves.

“Our intent was to build on the position in the event Jennifer (Morgan) moves on and is no longer with us, the pay for the position will be competitive,” Facione said.

What’s more troubling to Hackel is the HSB’s actions were taken at special meetings out of public view, not the routine sessions published on the facility’s website.

“This misrepresentation and selective disclosure is highly offensive,” Hackel wrote to the county board. “(B)ut what is more egregious is the conspiracy to keep all this from public view.”

The HSB held a special meeting one week before the regular meeting and no record of that session was made on Martha T. Berry’s website. Minutes of the meeting were prepared by Morgan, instead of a staff member, but were not posted on the site.

Facione, chairman of the HSB, who is resigning from the panel after 18 years due to family issues, said the panel routinely rotates its meeting locations to visit other social services district offices in the county under the board’s authority.

At the same time, Martha T. Berry’s overall quality ratings is poor, according to information published on the Medicare.gov website. The facility has received a “much below average” rating — one out of five stars — based on government inspections and staffing levels. These nationwide rankings of nursing homes are based, in part, on consumer surveys.

In addition, state authorities have hit Martha T. Berry with fines totaling thousands of dollars in recent years for violating nursing home standards.

Opened in 1949, the 217-bed facility operates more like a nursing home than a hospital and serves as home to some of Macomb County’s most chronically ill residents. The patients, ranging from teenagers to senior citizens, require long-term care due to accident, illness or disease that has left them paralyzed, comatose or incapacitated.

Steven Girard, an attorney from the Clark Hill law firm that specializes in labor and employment law, said Morgan had asked for the salary increase to make the position competitive.

In terms of the quality of service being rated so low, Girard said there was a misunderstanding by the HSB over when information was supposed to be submitted for the service rating.

“A lot of information that makes up the stars comes from the facility’s type of care that must be put in the system at the right time or you don’t get credit for it, which is what was happening here,” Girard said.

“The HSB had a consultant come in and determined that if the information is accurately recorded, Martha T. Berry will get its credit from the star rating. It’s not a perfect system. The quality of care is very high

and we have caring employees. We're not saying improvements can't be made."

Representatives of AFSCME Local 411, which includes the vast majority of workers at Martha T. Berry, said the rank and file workers haven't had raises in at least a decade,

"I think it's horrific timing for them to go before the board and ask for" additional compensation, said Local 411 President Donna Cangemi. "My members are some of the lowest paid in the county and we've also had implemented large health care premiums, as much as \$400 a month."

The criticism launched by Hackel is the latest in an ongoing feud between his office and the team that runs county-owned Martha T. Berry Medical Facility in Mount Clemens.

[In December, 2014, after months of political bickering](#), the HSB assumed full control of the facility. At the same time Macomb County ended its supplemental resources and subsidies to Martha T. Berry.

The Board of Commissioners established the facility in 1949. One of 35 county-owned medical facilities in Michigan, it is now funded almost entirely on Medicaid and Medicare now that county funds are not used to subsidize the center.

Dave Flynn, chairman of the county board, said the board's Health & Human Services Committee has scheduled an April 13 hearing to discuss several items including the ranking system and an action plan to address quality of care for Martha T. Berry residents.

"I personally don't want to pit one group against another," Flynn said. "I'm more interested in the quality of care issues."

URL: <http://www.macombdaily.com/government-and-politics/20160326/as-ratings-slide-hackel-blasts-raise-for-macomb-county-martha-t-berry-boss>

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