



Parish of Ascension

OFFICE OF THE PARISH PRESIDENT

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Parish Council Votes in Opposition of State Health Department Changes

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DONALDSONVILLE – By a unanimous vote, the Ascension Parish Council passed a resolution Thursday opposing the transfer of the Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs to the state Department of Health and Hospitals.

The council passed the resolution at their April 4 parish council meeting.

Ascension Council on Aging Executive Director Darlene Schexnayder expressed her concerns to the Parish Council at the March 15 in Gonzales about recent changes taking place in state government. Schexnayder announced she was asking for support from the parish council to oppose the “current takeover of the Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs by the Department of Health and Hospitals.”

Schexnayder said in a prepared statement that the proposed move was being done under the veil of consolidating offices. She said she and other council on aging (COA) directors in the state are questioning why the move was being made when the current structure has worked well starting from the 1970’s. Schexnayder said this fall will mark 40 years of service that the Ascension COA has provided for the senior citizens of Ascension Parish.

“Seniors can call our offices and speak to a live person,” Schexnayder said. “We assist them in all aspects of needs and if we can’t help them, we find someone who can help them.”

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Schexnayder said her office provides help to seniors filling out applications for other services, help to seniors navigating automated phone systems and help with navigating state agency websites.

She said her office is the only provider for transportation to doctor appointments, pharmacy visits, grocery shopping and social service agency visits for seniors and disabled passengers.

“Last year we served over 90,400 home-delivered meals and are on target to serve over 100,000 this fiscal year,” Schexnayder said.

Schexnayder said the senior centers provide seniors with a place to have a meal, socialize and have recreational opportunities along with educational programs. They also have increased homemaker services and wellness programs, she said.

The COA has recently partnered with LSU to bring leisure classes to Ascension Parish, and future plans include renovating the senior centers to increase programs for the expanding senior population, she said.

“In Ascension, we are very fortunate to have a millage tax that helps to support our programs and we have continued to expand our services,” Schexnayder said. “So far, we have been able to keep up with the demand for services, but that may not always be the case. Any loss in funding would jeopardize the programs that we have in place.

“While we have been assured by the Department of Health and Hospitals that all of our funding is intact for (fiscal year) 2013, what about the future?,” she said.

Schexnayder said the COA had been told there is no benefit for DHH in this merger, however the issue of leveraging state and local funds to get additional federal dollars kept surfacing during a recent stake holders meeting.

“If we turn over any funds to them for leveraging, we would lose control of these funds and would not be guaranteed that any of the federal dollars that are drawn down would be returned to us,” she said. “And we may not even get our matching funds returned.

“I’m concerned about the state getting too involved in parish business and trying to control our programs and our funding,” Schexnayder said. “I’m asking for your support in our opposition to this proposed transfer of the Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs to the Department of Health and Hospitals.”

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Council Chairman Chris Loar thanked Schexnayder during the March 15 meeting for work that her board and the COA accomplished in providing services for the senior citizens of Ascension Parish. Loar said the council would be in communication with the local state legislators to make sure the COA's funding sources would be protected.



Ascension Council on Aging Director Darlene Schexnayder addressed the parish council at their meeting on March 15 concerning state health department changes and how that could affect Ascension Parish.

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