



Cuyahoga County Restructures Health and Human Services

By William Tarter, Jr, Policy Planning Associate & Community Advocacy

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Last month, Cuyahoga County Council approved the appointment of Mr. Tom Pristow to oversee the Cuyahoga County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DHHS is the umbrella for Cuyahoga County divisions of Senior and Adult Services, Children and Family Services, Job and Family Services, and Community Initiatives. Additionally, other offices such as Early Childhood/Invest in Children, Office of Reentry, Homeless Services, and Family and Children First Council will report to Mr. Pristow. Mr. Pristow, who has been with Cuyahoga County for 11 months, will serve both as head of the entire DHHS and as the administrator of the Division of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Pristow has served as the Director of Children and Family Services for Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services, overseeing 2,000 employees and \$750 million according to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*¹.

Mr. Pristow will report to Mr. Matt Carroll, Chief of Economic Opportunity & Growth Officer—a new position created by County Executive Armond Budish. Previously, Mr. Carroll served in an interim role overseeing the separate HHS divisions. With this change in staffing structure, the County aims to bring together the two worlds of health and human services and economic development. Instead of them acting independently, the hope is that there can be better coordination between economic development activities and improvement in the health of citizens. The Chief Economic Officer will also report to Mr.

¹http://www.cleveland.com/cuyahoga-county/index.ssf/2015/04/cuyahoga_county_makes_pair_of_hires_for_top_social-service_jobs.html

Carroll. In his new role, Mr. Carroll will continue reporting directly to Cuyahoga County Chief of Staff Sharon Sobol Jordan.

Several potential benefits have been identified related to the restructuring. County officials expect “back office” functions such as contracting, human resources, and other departments to be consolidated, saving the County money long term, but they don’t anticipate any change in quality of service delivery to citizens.

Additionally, a larger shared-service DHHS will mean that the County will be reimbursed at higher amounts, than if the different divisions operated separately.

Lastly, since the different divisions will report to one director, more information can be shared and it can be done more frequently, potentially avoiding duplication of efforts.

What is not immediately clear is what the new leadership at the Cuyahoga County Health and Human Services Department—and subsequent move towards consolidation of back office operations—will mean for current staffing levels, or what cost savings might immediately result to the County.

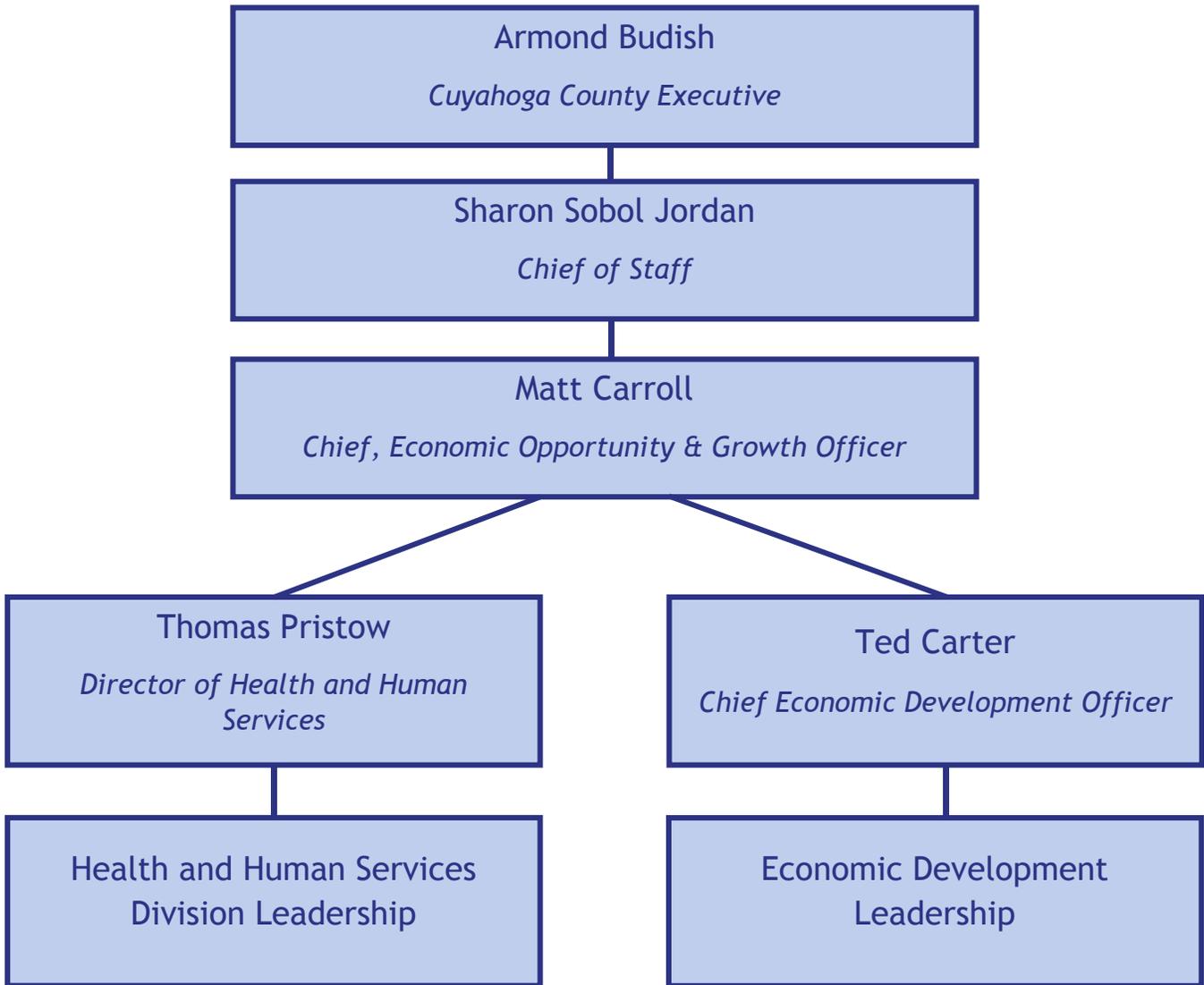
Among the items being discussed is the establishment of a consolidated “No Wrong Door” call center that could take calls on a wide variety of health and human service issues. The concept of a “no wrong door” has been a consistent interest of Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish. But a challenge with such an approach is making sure that those taking calls have immediate access to information on the broad variety of services provided by Cuyahoga County. For example, when an older adult calls into a consolidated call center, will the answering representative be well versed on issues such as geriatrics, Social Security, and other senior-related issues? Currently, the Department of Senior and Adult Services (DSAS) operates a senior-only call center, which answers questions directly or routes the caller to the appropriate DSAS department during daytime business hours.

There is precedent for a consolidated call center approach, however. During off-hours, calls placed by seniors are answered by the Children and Family Services Call Center, which takes messages and passes them to DSAS the following morning. Similarly, United Way of Greater Cleveland’s 2-1-1- First Call for Help program has been providing this type of information and referral services to seniors for many years. United Way 2-1-1 receives funding from the Cuyahoga County Department of Senior and Adult Services, the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County, and United Way of Greater Cleveland.

The key question centers on assurance to citizens, including seniors, that a consolidated approach will ensure access to the requested information and services in a timely manner.

Twenty years ago, Cuyahoga County health and human service programs were similarly consolidated, but the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (e.g. welfare reform) led the county to separate the departments so that more focus could be given to the thousands of welfare recipients that were expected to move from welfare to work. At the time, it was also thought that having separate agencies would allow for greater specialization and greater customer satisfaction.

See Organizational Chart Below



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