

County flip-flops on mental health nominee

By RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

Tempers flared Monday as members of the Oakland County Commission tried for the second time to nominate three people to seats on the Community Mental Health Service Board.

When the dust settled, the General Government Commission nominated Franklin resident Richard Herrie, Royal Oak resident Judith Summers and Bloomfield Hills resident Shelley Taub, who is also a Republican county commissioner.

With the county likely to take control of the distribution of all state mental health money in Oakland, the clamor regarding who serves on the mental health board has gotten a lot louder, said commissioner Marilyn Gosling, 13 Bloomfield Hills.

Currently the 12-member mental health board distributes about \$30 million a year to various organizations that help retarded

people and adults and children with mental illnesses. The state controls the distribution of another \$50 million in Oakland County.

If the county takes over "full management" of the distribution, it would get to pass out the whole bundle, expected to be at least \$80 million.

"That balloons the responsibility of the mental health board substantially," said Gosling, who is also a member of that board.

The county commission shot down the General Government Committee's first three nominees April 29 because one of them, Southfield resident Calvin Lippitt, is president of the Alliance for the Mentally III and therefore might have a conflict of interest.

In a packed committee room Monday four spectators spoke in defense of Lippitt, whom they hoped the committee would nominate again.

But just one committee member voted for Lippitt, although six

had put him on their lists in April. Committee Chairman Donald Jensen, R-Birmingham, who voted for Lippitt the first time, but not the second, said that Lippitt fell out of favor as the committee's scrutiny intensified. "I guess I didn't know as much about him then as I do now," Jensen said.

The committee also dropped Clawson resident Sherry Samson, who got five votes the first time and none the second. "Some of us felt that her qualifications weren't quite strong enough," Jensen said.

The only survivor from the first list is Taub, who is a member of the General Government Committee and voted for herself in April and again last Monday.

If the commission confirms Taub's nomination there will then be four county commissioners on the mental health board. The addition of Herrie came as a surprise for many. Recruited by

Jensen, Herrie turned down the request to apply the first time, then changed his mind later.

Herrie is the parent of a mentally retarded adult, chairman of the Oakland County Regional Interagency Coordinating Council, sometimes mental health advisor to Gov. John Engler and county executive L. Brooks Patterson. "I know Dick Herrie very well," Patterson said. "His is an opinion I value. But we're not associated in any official way."

Dolores Howell, a past president of the Alliance for the Mentally III, called Herrie's nomination "a slap in the face to our group. It's offensive as well as unacceptable."

Herrie said "there is no truth to a lot of the statements (about me) Dolores Howell made. Mrs. Howell is as far from the truth as anybody can be."

Jensen said there was a "surprising absence of lobbying" in the month between nominating

meetings, but commissioner Lillian Jaffe Oaks, D-Southfield, said the vote was very political.

Indeed, four of the committee's six Republicans (Jensen, Taub, Donn Wolf, R-Farmington Hills, and Kay Schmid, R-Novi) voted for Taub, Lippitt and Samson in April, then for Taub, Summers and Herrie last Monday.

In a hallway outside the meeting room, Oaks asked Law what Herrie's qualifications are. "I forget," Law said. "You have to read the letter" that Herrie sent to some of the commissioners.

Summers was another surprise nominee last Monday, considering that she got zero votes in April. Summers is a member of the board of directors for Arc of Oakland County, an advocacy group for retarded children.

An angry letter was sent to the commission by Arc director Tom Kendzioriski after Summers was passed over the first time. Other than that, Kendzioriski said, no lobbying took place on Summers' behalf.

Jensen said that Summers is preferable to Lippitt because she's "not totally Arc minded."

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