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## Help for seniors is on the way

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— ALBION — The aging population has a lot to consider when it comes to long-term care, including health insurance, medical care and even meals. Senior citizens figure to benefit from a new state initiative that would centralize many of those programs into a “single point of entry” in Orleans County.

Commissioner of Social Services Carri Ludwig and Director of the Office for the Aging Pam Canham spoke to the county Legislature on Wednesday about the state-instituted changes.

“It’s the governor’s proposal,” Canham said. “It’s mandated at this point.”

The restructuring of long-term care statewide consists of several initiatives, including the expansion of insurance options, assisting health care facilities, applying for a Medicaid waiver to restructure eligibility standards and the changing of Medicaid reimbursement requirements. The fifth initiative, the only one discussed at Wednesday’s meeting, is the “single point of entry” for information and assessment for seniors and the disabled.

“A person would have to go to a single place and be approved for the help they need,” Ludwig said.

With the institution of the program in Orleans County, those eligible would be able to contact the Office for the Aging and be directed and referred to various long-term care agencies. Ludwig said the referrals would be both medical and

non-medical in nature.

“It would include transportation needs, housekeeping services, home-delivered meal services, as well as medical services,” Ludwig said.

Canham said the program would be funded by an annual \$52,000 state grant for up to five years. The grant application must be submitted by June 23 for funding to start October 1.

If received, the grant would provide for nine months of start-up costs for the program, with the site being operational for services July 1, 2007.

“We would screen for services needed,” Canham said. “People could call in, we would ask them questions and refer them (to other agencies).”

The next step in getting the initiative rolling is to designate a lead agency. The county has the option to choose the Office for the Aging and/or the Department of Social Services. If the county declines to do so, the state will seek a not-for-profit group to make that designation.

Chief Administrative Officer Charles Nesbitt Jr. raised the point that any staff hired under the grant would need to understand they may not be eligible for retirement benefits and the job may only run for the five years the grant lasts if the program is not extended. Legislative Chairman George Bower said they could examine adding a “sunset” clause to the staff contract that says there is no promise to extend employment once the five years is complete.

After the initial five years, the program would go into phase two of the initiative, which involves actually assessing what senior citizens are eligible for instead of just referring them to other agencies.

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