

Knox County Statement
August 31, 2023

As many of you are aware, there has been some degree of turmoil within the County recently. While we suspect that this may have been developing for quite some time, it has come to a head in the past several weeks. We would like to take this opportunity to address the situation publicly.

First, we hear you and we understand your concerns. They are legitimate. As your elected leaders it is our responsibility to listen to you, to see what may be wrong, and to take action to correct problems when and where they exist. We are doing that.

Second, and to the issue of what may be wrong and requiring correction, we understand that the immediate matter is the situation involving our Communications Center. As you know, we have taken action to address the imminent threat to public safety by entering into an agreement with Waldo County to handle our 911 calls, while also ensuring that we remain equipped to handle all dispatch calls within Knox County. We are also engaged in discussions with the employee's union that represents our communications employees and are working in collaboration with them to recruit and retain employees to ensure that we remain fully operational, with the goal of resuming responsibility for handling 911 calls originating in our county.

However, we have come to understand that there are larger and more fundamental issues that require our attention and response. The immediate matter involving the Communications Center is, in our view, only a symptom of a more widespread problem. While we do not pretend to know the full extent of the problem or its origin, it is our belief that it stems in large part from a lack of effective communication between County officials and County employees, as well as between County officials and the public at large. We have come to understand that this situation in general, and the lack of effective communication in particular, has existed for quite some time. While the causes of the situation are likely varied and widespread with no particular person or group of people solely responsible, we together with our County Administrator accept full and complete responsibility. We intend to take appropriate measures to correct it.

Some of these are immediate, and others are yet to be determined and will take some time. Just as we do not pretend to know the full extent of the situation or its origin, we also do not claim to have a complete or perfect solution. We have, however, put in place some measures which we believe will address the communications issues in the near term, while we continue to evaluate the root causes of the problems and what the most effective remedies will be for the long term.

At this time we have taken the following actions:

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primary responsibility for personnel management has been assigned to the Human Resources department such that all personnel matters will now be directed there

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the Human Resources department will report directly to the Commissioners

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collective bargaining and other union related matters will now be handled by the Human Relations department, with the involvement of one of the Commissioners, as well as department heads where appropriate.

It is our belief that these actions, effective immediately, will address the challenges associated with ineffective communications between County administration and employees as well as County administration and the public.

For the longer term, we are considering a variety of alternatives, including requiring county officials to participate in leadership development and personnel management improvement strategies.

In closing, we are committed to address and resolve in a meaningful and lasting manner the challenges that have brought us to this point. We welcome your constructive input as we move forward to build a stronger and better Knox County. Both the county administrator and I would be happy to sit down with any select board or town administrator to discuss what works, and what doesn't, and how we can do better.

Signed by the members of the Knox County Commission:

Edward Glaser – Chair

Richard Parent

Sharyn Pohlman

Signed by the Knox County Administrator

Andrew Hart

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