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Local health department eliminates 6 positions

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2 programs also ending due to cuts in federal, state funding

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Six positions and two programs have been eliminated from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) due to a reduction in federal funds passed through the state of Michigan as grants. Pictured is the MMDHD's office in Stanton. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

STANTON — Six positions and two programs have been eliminated from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) due to a reduction in federal funds passed through the state of Michigan as grants.

The cuts come in the wake of the U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) cutting federal spending, an initiative that was led by billionaire business owner Elon Musk.

The MMDHD Board of Health, which covers Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, met for a regular meeting on June 25 and went into closed session to discuss the elimination of one of the positions. When the Daily News learned of the action, it notified MMDHD officials that this is not a legal reason to go into closed session, according to the Michigan Open Meetings Act (see below for more on that).

After the Board of Health returned to open session, members voted to approve a recommendation from Health Officer Liz Braddock to eliminate for fiscal year 2026 the following five positions: Health educator, quality improvement coordinator, epidemiologist, public health nurse and public health representative.

The quality improvement coordinator was laid off, the health educator voluntarily resigned and the epidemiologist, public health nurse and public health representative all retired.

A sixth position was eliminated by the MMDHD earlier this year, along with two programs.

A community health worker position was eliminated in April due to funding loss and the grant-funded Pathways to Better Health program was ended, with clients being referred to 2-1-1 for services. That staff member did not lose their job as they were reassigned to an open position within the health department.

The MMDHD has contracted with the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) for a school nurse to provide services through a Health Resource Advocate grant-funded program, but that program ended in May due to a reduction in funding.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in March announced the cancellation of approximately \$12 billion in federal grants initially allocated during the COVID pandemic. The federal cancellation involved 20 grants in Michigan totaling more than \$380 million, or approximately \$2 million involving the MMDHD. As the cuts occurred halfway through the fiscal year, the MMDHD had already spent half of the money.

The MMDHD estimates it lost approximately \$800,000 in grant funding this year.

Braddock informed the Board of Health in April that the federal government was canceling remaining COVID funding to the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS).

“There were tremendous efforts to reduce the budget with the cuts that we have experienced,” Braddock wrote in July’s Board of Health meeting packet. “There have been reductions in staffing as mentioned above, travel and training, supplies and communications. The budget will need to be monitored carefully in the upcoming fiscal year. There have been increases in operations such as health insurance increases, retirement costs, wage increases and others, but we have tried to be diligent in attempting to keep costs down and increase revenue streams such as through grant funding and billing commercial insurances, etc.”

Additionally, there was a 28% reduction in funding for public health emergency preparedness, which involves federal dollars passed on through the state of Michigan, which Braddock said resulted in a contractual obligation ending. The MMDHD requested an increase of \$30,000 in appropriations (\$10,000 each from Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties) to cover the reduction in emergency preparedness funding, which each of the three counties approved.

"We are able to keep the program whole at the local level," Braddock told the Daily News. "There have been some changes at the state level; for example, we are no longer able to order free COVID tests that residents could pick up at our office or we have shared with community organizations. We have a few boxes left at the Stanton office if the public needs to get tested.

"We are unsure of availability to order Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) gloves, masks, gowns and shields that we were able to offer to dairy farm employees during the avian flu outbreak or would offer to community partners if there was a need," she added. "No one is asking for PPE right now, so it's not a big concern."

Meanwhile, Michigan legislators have less than one month to avert a state government shutdown amid a struggle to reach a budget agreement across party lines.

"We continue to watch the state budget process since state and federal dollars make up around 70 percent of our local budget," Braddock told the Daily News. "We still have many unknowns until the state budget is signed, and we may receive more or less MDHHS allocations in other grants. We have not reduced any additional programs for Montcalm County and residents are not currently being impacted."

OPEN MEETINGS ACT

The MMDHD Board of Health is comprised of Chairman Adam Petersen (who is vice chair of the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners), Matt Murray (a Montcalm County commissioner), Bruce DeLong and Nicole Fickes (both of whom are Clinton County commissioners with DeLong serving as that board's chair) and George Bailey and Steven Sopocy (both of whom are Gratiot County commissioners).

The Open Meetings Act does not allow a government body to go into closed session to discuss budget cuts and/or related employee layoffs.

Petersen told the Daily News that as chairman of the Board of Health, he didn't believe a closed session was needed in this instance, but he allowed it at the request of Braddock, as no members of the public or media were present for June's meeting.

"I advised that this will be the last time that it would happen without it (a closed session) being on the agenda and proper reasoning," Petersen said.

A public body may go into closed session to consider the dismissal of an employee, but only if that employee requests a closed hearing on the matter. Braddock confirmed with the Daily News that none of the employees in question requested a closed hearing on the matter.

“We went into closed session to discuss the pause in March to some state funding grants becoming terminated for FY2026,” Braddock recounted. “We thought that the layoff would be considered a dismissal, but perhaps that is not correct.”

The next Board of Health meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. on Sept. 24. All meetings are open to the public. Visit mmdhd.org/2025-board-of-health-meetings for more information.

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