

Health and Human Services Committee
Confirmation Hearing – Courtney N. Phillips, MPA
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Courtney N. Phillips, MPA
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Good afternoon, Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Courtney Phillips (C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y P-h-i-l-l-i-p-s) and today marks my one month anniversary serving as CEO of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

It is an honor and privilege to serve in this capacity. Before I go into a little background information about me, I would like to thank each of you for taking time to meet with me over the past few weeks to discuss your concerns and propose next steps.

Now for a little bit about me.

Up until my move to Nebraska, I've lived solely in Louisiana. I am from a small town south of New Orleans, Port Sulphur, at the tip of the Louisiana boot. As you all know, I have a three-year old son, Langston, and I received both my Bachelor's Degree in Kinesiology and a Master of Public Administration from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. I'm currently working toward my Ph.D. in Public Policy through Southern University, also in Baton Rouge.

Upon completion of my MPA, I began my tenure with the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals as a Management Intern. I was fortunate to have had early experiences and opportunities within the Department that challenged me and allowed me to grow as a professional and as a leader.

Those experiences have helped to cultivate an appreciation for programs and spirit that enable us to effectively recruit, develop and retain top talent within the organizations I have worked.

That being said – we will be developing and strengthening the Department's connections to Nebraska's universities, colleges and high schools because we continually need quality employees at all positions in our organization.

One of our focuses will be on employee relations, including: recruitment, development, retention and ongoing succession planning.

Our goal should be that when students graduate, our department is where they want to be. I believe in where I am, what we do as an organization, and the DHHS team who are a committed group of individuals.

The earlier part of my career at DHH was spent working within various Medicaid programs. I was involved in developing and implementing policies as well as working with the budget to analyze and maximize financing options.

My program experience included managing psychological and behavioral services as part of a federally mandated lawsuit, and other Medicaid programs such as the mental health clinic program, mental health rehab program, money follows the person, hospital admission review process, and the transportation, dental and vision programs.

In 2009 I was afforded the opportunity to broaden my experience as an executive management officer for the Department's Deputy Secretary, a position I would later serve in myself.

Before that however, I served as the Secretary's Chief of Staff (which is sometimes known as the Department's fire fighter). Both of these positions involved taking on broader, agency-wide responsibilities including management and oversight of the agency's budget, stakeholder relations, and operational functions for an agency with an annual budget of over \$9 billion and, at the time, more than 11,000 employees.

I was also involved with and helped coordinate a number of large initiatives, such as:

- The creation of the Office of Behavioral Health (an integration of our Addictive Disorders and Mental Health offices),
- The Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership including the System of Care initiative which provides and coordinates behavioral health needs for at risk youth across the Departments of Health and Hospitals, Children and Family Services, Education and the Office of Juvenile Justice. I know this is also an important issue for many of you here on the committee and certainly many Nebraskan families who are struggling at times to navigate a complex and fragmented system. There are many opportunities for states to learn from each other's experiences and I believe that we can do more when we work together on a common goal.

I became deputy secretary of the Department in 2013, a position I held until coming to Nebraska. In this position I served as the Chief Operating Officer of DHH and had direct programmatic oversight and supervision for Behavioral Health, Public Health, Aging and Adult Services, the Commission for the Deaf, and Citizens with Developmental Disabilities. I also provided leadership for the Community Human Services Statewide Framework (Human Service Authorities) ---essentially the broader governing framework for the regionalized delivery of behavioral health and developmental disability services, and many other initiatives that came along. Similar to our Nebraska BH regional operations.

So I say, I believe my experiences have prepared me to work with Governor Ricketts and this body to lead the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. I know there are challenges, but these are indeed opportunities that I'm up for exploring and seeing improvements to fruition. I'm excited to be here to work with those we serve, you all, DHHS employees, and our external partners to make the changes necessary to be a top agency.

During my short time here I've been learning about the Department from both inside and out. I've met with numerous employees and visited some of our offices and facilities, including sitting in on call sessions at one of the ACCESSNebraska customer service centers. I've met with policymakers like you, collaborative partners and external stakeholders. I'm learning a great deal from different perspectives, and that's important and necessary for us to develop a strong plan to move forward and seek continuous improvement.

I intend to continue this process and once Session ends, I plan to get on the road and begin meeting our team and stakeholders across the state. As we make policies we have to consider all parts of the state.

I do know this: We can't do it alone. We at DHHS have the Governor's support, which I fully appreciate, and we'll need help from you and other members of the Legislature, as well as the families we serve, providers, associations and other stakeholders to make these improvements realities.

Again, I look forward to the work ahead and I make a commitment to you all, my staff, and my fellow Nebraskans to give it my all.

And, I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.