

May 9, 2003

Representative Roger S. Ishee
P.O. Box 6845
Gulfport, Mississippi 39506-6845

Dear Representative Ishee,

Thank you for your letter dated May 6, 2003 concerning the shortage of Department of Human Services Protective Social Workers in Harrison County and the other coastal counties. While the shortage is statewide, we recognize there is a critical situation on the coast.

I share your concerns and feel that protecting our children is the most important issue before us as leaders. My staff has been working with staff from the Department of Human Services on a regular basis in effort to assist them as they struggle to alleviate this serious situation. There have been meetings conducted with the National Social Worker Association, Mississippi Chapter, and representatives from Mississippi colleges and universities that have a social worker program. While we have not seen an increase in the number of social workers in Harrison County that we had all hoped for, we will continue to work hard to make sure that our children on the coast get the protection that they deserve.

Despite efforts to recruit social workers, applications from licensed social workers have not materialized. There has been little or no response to recruitment ads in the Sun Herald, the National Social Worker Association Newsletter that is distributed statewide bi-monthly, the face-to-face job recruitment efforts in the colleges, or job fairs conducted across the state, including one held on the coast. Despite the fact that these efforts have not yet resulted in additional social workers for the coast, we are committed to improving this situation and will continue in our efforts.

I have referred a copy of your letter directly to Thelma Brittain, Executive Director of the Department of Human Resources, so that your specific questions can be addressed. I would also welcome your input to any further activity that will result in qualified social worker applicants. We pledge to work with all interested parties until we reach our goal to fully staff these critical shortages.

If you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

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