

State help planned following hospital closure

(KAIR)--Kansas Governor Laura Kelly is concerned for the Horton community.

In a news release issued Wednesday following Tuesday's closure of the Horton Community Hospital, Kelly said she has directed state agencies to coordinate support for hospital staff during what she calls a "challenging time."

According to the release, the KANSASWORKS team will be in Horton Thursday to assist hospital staff with filing for unemployment benefits, as well as job applications and re-employment services.

The Governor's Office, Kansas Department of Commerce and Kansas Department of Labor are working to provide support to employees of the hospital, ensure unemployment benefits applications are streamlined, and re-employment opportunities are available.

KANSASWORKS will be hosting Rapid Response Informational Meetings Thursday in Horton in conjunction with the Community Outreach Event at the Horton Public Library.

Efforts to assist affected hospital employees will include Rapid Response Informational Meetings Thursday afternoon at 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00, at the Horton Public Library. Registration is not required.

Information will be shared about KANSASWORKS, Workforce Center employment and training services and how to file unemployment insurance benefits.

Also, the KANSASWORKS Mobile Workforce Center will be at the Horton Public Library Thursday afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00 to provide additional re-employment services. Workforce Center staff will be available to help with registering on KANSASWORKS.com, creating a resumé, job search assistance and filling out job applications.

Kelly, in the release, called local hospitals "key to the health of Kansas families and are often one of the largest employers in a small town." She added that "elected leaders must work together to do more to support our local hospitals."

Along with Horton's hospital, the release notes closure of two other rural Kansas hospitals within the last three months, including Mercy Hospital in Fort Scott and the Oswego Community Hospital.

Horton Hospital's closing follows financial struggles, with Florida-based firm iHealthcare retained in February to take over management of the troubled facility.

Horton City Administrator John Calhoon said the employees that remained at the hospital prior to the closing had not received a paycheck since February 15. "They've given everything they could to try and hold out as long as they can."

Horton Mayor Bryan Stirton told MSC News Tuesday, prior to the closing, that negative impacts will be felt in the Horton community. "If folks have to leave to find new jobs, it will impact the school district, too. All of the local businesses will suffer. I commend the employees for their support to keeping the hospital open this long. Without them it would have been closed by now."

The Brown County Commission Monday approved an agreement with Hiawatha-based Town and Country EMS to provide ambulance service in the southern portion of the county in anticipation of the closure.

Calhoon said arrangements are now in place to house the ambulances, and to provide a small office for personnel. "We have had several meetings over the past few weeks and made arrangements with Town and Country Ambulance Service, and their owner, to immediately take over ambulance service, so that will be covered. The ambulances will be housed at the armory here in Horton. They're already there stationed."

That plan went into effect at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the time the hospital closed its doors.

Beside a 25-bed critical access hospital, the Horton hospital operated a clinic and ambulance service.

The Hiawatha Community Hospital, which is also struggling financially, has committed to opening a health clinic in Horton should voters approve a 10-year countywide half-cent sales tax during a special election in May.

The Brown County Commission Monday approved a resolution setting that special election for May 21.

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