

Office of the Secretary
915 SW Harrison St., 6th Floor
Topeka, KS 66612-1354



Phone: (785) 296-3271
Fax: (785) 296-4685
www.srs.ks.gov

Robert Siedlecki, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

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Contact Angela De Rocha or Rachel Whitten

(785) 296-3271

Angela.deRocha@srs.ks.gov

Rachel.Whitten@srs.ks.gov

Douglas County, City of Lawrence, Kansas SRS reach accord to keep Lawrence SRS office open

Representatives of the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services and officials of Douglas County and the City of Lawrence have reached agreement on a proposal that would avoid closure of the Lawrence SRS Office.

Under the terms of the proposal, both Douglas County and the City of Lawrence would temporarily commit financial assistance to allow SRS to meet cost reductions mandated in the state budget without closure of the Lawrence office. The proposal requires the approval of the Douglas County Commission and the Lawrence City Commission following public hearings.

"Douglas County and the City of Lawrence came to us with a proposal and we were more than willing to work with them," Secretary Siedlecki said. "Their proposal will help SRS to meet its cost-cutting objectives, as set by the Legislature, while keeping the Lawrence office open. Everyone wins."

"I view this proposal as a temporary partnership between local and state government that will benefit the entire community," Commission Chairman Jim Flory stated. "Not only will approval of this proposal assure the continuance of essential social services to our constituents, it will also continue the economic benefit realized locally from a significant state payroll and by avoiding additional budgetary demands on many local social service agencies."

“This proposal allows for the continuation of SRS services in Lawrence,” said Mayor Aron Cromwell. “SRS provides vital services to many of our residents. It is important to the Lawrence community to maintain the SRS presence in Lawrence.”

Secretary Siedlecki added, “I sincerely regret the disruption in the lives of some of our most dedicated workers that this reorganization has caused as the result of the \$42 million in cuts the Legislature made to our budget. SRS employees, like the clients they serve, are being affected by the dire condition of our state and national economies.”

“It is our preference to keep this SRS office open beyond September of 2013, but that will depend on the economic circumstances of the state government. We have committed to the community in Lawrence to make a good faith effort to seek adequate funding in subsequent years for that purpose,” Siedlecki said.

Specifics of the proposal:

The City of Lawrence and Douglas County would each pay a total of \$112,500 to SRS in 2012, and \$112,500 in 2013. The state would agree that these payments would be sufficient to enable SRS to meet the current budget cuts mandated by the legislature, without closing the Lawrence SRS office. In return, the Secretary of SRS would agree that SRS will continue to operate a full service office in Lawrence, with the preference of keeping the office in Lawrence open on a long-term basis, depending on the economic conditions of the state government, without further subsidies after 2013.

The county funds would come from money currently budgeted for future economic development projects. The County’s commitment will not require a mill levy increase.

The city funds would come from the City’s fund balances.

The Lawrence City Commission will consider the proposal during their Tuesday evening meeting, and the Douglas County Commission will consider the proposal Wednesday.