



State's secretary for aging, disability to move to Kansas Health Institute

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November 23, 2015

The secretary of the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability is leaving at the end of the year to go to the Kansas Health Institute.

Kari Bruffett's departure is the fourth Cabinet-level resignation from the Brownback administration since June.

Gov. Sam Brownback's office announced the resignation Monday. It did not say who would be the interim secretary.

"Kari has served the citizens of Kansas well," Brownback said in a release. "She has dedicated her career to serving those in need and I am grateful for her service."

Angela de Rocha, department spokeswoman, would not comment and said Bruffett was not in the office Monday.

The agency manages aging programs, disability and behavioral services and the state's mental health hospitals at Larned and Osawatomie.

Bruffett has been with the Brownback administration since 2011 and was named the agency's secretary in May 2014. She said she was grateful for her time at the department.

She is the second secretary to leave the department since the state privatized its Medicaid system in 2013. Medicaid is the government-run insurance program for people with low income or who are disabled. It is funded through state and federal dollars. Bruffett replaced Shawn Sullivan, who is now the state's budget director.

Providers who work in the disability community have previously talked about the staff turnover rate in the two departments that oversee Medicaid: the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Tom Laing, executive director of InterHab, a nonprofit organization for intellectual and developmental disability providers around the state, said he has seen a lapse of institutional knowledge within the aging and disability department.

“Losing Bruffett doesn’t help,” he said.

Laing spoke highly about Bruffett, but said he was disappointed in the state’s inconsistent leadership, especially in light of several policy changes that affect the disability community.

“This is very unsettling,” he said.

Without knowing who will fill the position, he said, “it’s hard to predict how we’ll respond.”

Bruffett will become director of policy for the Kansas Health Institute in early January.

Robert St. Peter, CEO of the Kansas Health Institute, said the institute approached Bruffett about three months ago and offered the job in the past few weeks, although he couldn’t recall the exact date.

He said she focus on Medicaid policies.

She will fill a job that combines what was previously two roles. She is replacing Duane Goossen, the former vice president for fiscal and health policy and Scott Brunner, former senior analyst and strategy team leader.

The resignation is the fourth for the Brownback administration in recent months.

Department of Administration Secretary Jim Clark retired in June.

Kansas Commerce Secretary Pat George announced his retirement in July and Brownback’s first pick, George Hansen, withdrew his name from consideration in September. Brownback tapped Anthony Soave of Overland Park; he will start in December.

Kansas Corrections Secretary Ray Roberts will retire at the end of the year.