
Opinion: Short Staffing hurts Del Norte

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Del Norte County is a small community. That means we have to do everything in our power to make sure we maximize our resources, especially when it comes to taking care of our families.

For the last 8 years, I've worked for the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Program here in Del Norte County. While the work can often be intense — imagine, caring for moms in crisis and for children who desperately need food — I love my job. Every day I get to care for our community's families. It's precisely because I love my job that Del Norte's unnecessary shortstaffing crisis is so infuriating.

Del Norte's WIC program should have a staff of 6. Instead, we have 2. That means we will have to reduce the number of clients we see from around 1000 to 700, based on our staffing levels. That's around 300 individuals we will not be able to service.

This reduction, while harmful to our community, doesn't even make fiscal sense. Because our program is funded from the state, we are effectively choosing to send around \$200,000 of public funding back to the state — money that has already been allocated to us and that would otherwise be supporting our local community.

Del Norte's staffing crisis is pervasive. Many county departments have vacancy rates of 30% with some over 50%. This means we can't keep our roads maintained the way we should; we can't get important benefits to residents in a timely way; and we can't protect our most vulnerable youth and seniors. When we have more

staff, we are bringing more money into the county while also being able to provide the necessary services our county needs.

Why are vacancies and staff turnover so high? Frankly, the county just isn't competitive. The county offers less to start than the fast food industry and requires degrees and certifications for work that can be stressful and challenging.

Can the county afford to address its short-staffing crisis? Yes. The county should take the same approach that it approved for the sheriff's office — freezing or eliminating a certain number of vacant positions to free up funding. This approach will help attract more qualified candidates for the remaining vacant positions and help us retain our experienced staff.

Del Norte deserves a responsive and effective county government. Its administration and its Board of Supervisors must take this commonsense approach to addressing its fiduciary and moral responsibilities. Del Norte's families can't wait.

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