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KAREN HARRINGTON NAMED SOCIAL SERVICES DIRECTOR

NEWTON, NC – The Catawba County Social Services Board has named Karen Harrington Director of Catawba County Social Services. Harrington, who joined Social Services as Assistant Director in 2013, has been serving as Interim Director of the agency since January 10, 2017.

As director, Harrington is officially taking the helm of one of the County's largest departments in terms of both programs and staff. She will be responsible for Social Services' administrative and managerial operations, which includes oversight of the department's budget and multi-faceted range of public assistance and prevention programs, group homes, and service agencies such as the Children's Advocacy Center and Family NET. Due to the highly complex nature of these services, Harrington must also ensure program delivery is in compliance with local, state and federal guidelines.

In addition to managing existing programs, Harrington is expected to continually assess community needs and work within Social Services and in collaboration with public and private partners to meet those needs. This may include expanding programs, developing new initiatives or identifying resources, all of which is done in advisement with the Social Services Board of Directors.

As Secretary to the Board, Harrington is responsible for informing Board members about current trends in the social work field as well as local conditions that necessitate action. She serves as the Board's liaison with Social Services clients, community members and partners, department staff, the Board of Commissioners and other elected officials, and County management in order to ensure informed and responsive agency relations and effective program delivery.

"While we don't generally celebrate loss, the Catawba County Department of Social Services Board of Directors is delighted that Karen Harrington will be losing the word 'interim' from her title," said Arnita Dula, Social Services Board Chair and Deputy City Attorney for the City of Hickory. "Karen has tremendous leadership qualities, and we look forward to continuing our work with her as she uses those qualities to strengthen our organization for the clients, partners, staff, and community we serve."

"I am honored to officially serve in this leadership role with Catawba County Social Services," said Harrington. "My job is to ensure a well-trained and competent workforce that is equipped to carry out our work in the most efficient yet competent manner possible. To accomplish that, my most immediate goal is to be as present as possible with our clients, our staff, and our partners in order to learn from them and maintain strong relationships at the local, state and national level.

"I believe it is important to honor and respect all citizens we meet in fulfilling our day-to-day mission," Harrington continued. "I also believe it is important to honor and support our employees, who have some of the most difficult jobs in the county. There is a lot of uncertainty in the social services field today, and by working together, I know we will continue meeting the highest standards of service to our community."

Harrington's previous responsibilities as Assistant Director involved overseeing the department's extensive child welfare programs and prevention programming. She also supervised the Executive Director of the Child Advocacy and Protection Center and served as the Social Services liaison to the organization's Board.

"In the four years Karen has worked with the County, she has brought significant leadership and vision to Social Services," said County Manager Mick Berry. "Karen is an excellent example of the depth of talent present in the Catawba County organization. We are looking forward to her continued participation in County leadership."

Harrington received a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Minot State University and a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Illinois. She brings more than 25 years of experience in the social services field as a social services caseworker, clinician, program supervisor, and administrator to her new role.

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