

Reimer questions Health Ministries funding request during county budget hearing

By: Chad Frey
NEWTON KANSAN

When appropriations for outside agencies come up during Harvey County budget meetings, at least one commissioner will vote against a requested \$10,000 appropriation for Health Ministries.

“There’s just such a need for people to be able to afford their property taxes, and so I’m looking for any way possible to decrease what just the small — you know, for the city of Newton, it’s just like a fourth of their property taxes — but since that’s our role, I want to take it seriously,” said commissioner Becky Reimer. “And since you already have some tax exemption, I’m not in favor of doing the \$10,000, because there’s already a benefit.”

The commission took no action May 19, simply hosting what the agenda called a budget hearing for the appropriation.

Action on the budget will come later.

The request for \$10,000 is the same amount requested for at least the last three budget cycles.

Health Ministries Clinic is a Federally Qualified Health Center serving Harvey County and surrounding communities. The clinic provides medical and dental services to anyone, and more than a third of patients seen are either private-pay or Medicaid patients.

“The value that we provide is multi-level,” said Matthew Schmidt, CEO of Health Ministries. “There is a lot. There is a value we provide in terms of quality of life for the service we provide and we create access. I also believe we provide a tremendous economic value both to the city and the county when you look at the employment that



Health Ministries added a mobile clinic to its offerings within the last few years. The organization is making budget presentations this month seeking local funding, asking this week for \$10,000 from Harvey County. [Kansan File]

we have.”

The clinic employs about 262 people. Health Ministries provides medical, dental and behavioral health services, along with in-house ancillary clinical services including laboratory work, diagnostic imaging and pharmacy services. In addition, the clinic tries to eliminate barriers to care for patients by providing limited transportation, language support and case management.

And the service numbers speak for themselves. About one in three residents of Harvey County receive services from Health Ministries. According to a report Schmidt generated for the budget hearing, 14,837 individuals received a health care service at HMC in 2025 through 60,800 patient visits.

About a quarter of those patients reside outside Harvey County.

HMC is the largest primary care

provider in Harvey County and operates clinic locations in Newton and Halstead, along with a mobile medical unit that expands access across the county.

HMC is also the only primary health care provider in the county that offers a full sliding fee scale up to 200% of the federal poverty level and accepts Medicaid without patient limits.

The clinic is also unique in offering integrated medical, dental and behavioral health services, along with discounted ancillary services including lab work and imaging.

“You know that there’s quite a bit of value that’s added there if you don’t turn anyone away. There’s a lot of people that wait too long in order to see a physician because they don’t feel like they can pay for it, but you don’t turn anyone away,” said commissioner Don

Schroeder. “Hopefully that helps that situation as well.”

Health Ministries has historically received funding from both Harvey County and the City of Newton and has leveraged that funding in grant applications.

“Our request is not to represent the actual need, but your dollars mean more to us,” Schmidt said. “Part of what that support demonstrates is local support. When we are making federal grants and foundation grants, we can use that to bring in a considerable amount of outside money into the county.”

According to a letter from Schmidt to the commission, Health Ministries brought in \$4.9 million in outside funding during 2025.

“If there’s something that we can do with a letter of recommendation for the value that you were saying that you see from the money, I would prefer that. I won’t be supporting the \$10,000 this time,” Reimer said.

“I think the value [of what a nonprofit does] needs to exceed the tax exemption, and I believe we do that,” Schmidt said.

In other business the commission:

Approved a Sole-Source Agreement for WIC Registered Dietitian Services with Reno County.

Awarded Bids for 2026 Half Ton, 4x4 Pickup for the Harvey County Parks Department. The winning bid came from Midway Motors for a total of \$34,294.

Awarded HVAC bids for systems in the county parks. The winning bidder was Fahnestock Plumbing HVAC & Electric for \$28,609 to install new systems at Volunteer Hall at East Park and the Camp Hawk shelter.

Hesston College celebrates 116th annual commencement ceremony

By: Special to the Kansan

HESSTON — The Hesston College graduating class of 2026 celebrated the close of one chapter and the beginning of another during the college’s 116th Commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 16, in Yost Center. Through messages centered on faith, trust and the power of community, graduates were encouraged to embrace the unknown with confidence in God’s calling and gratitude for the relationships that shaped their journey.

This year’s commencement address, delivered by nursing professor Chantel Cherney, encouraged graduates to “never say never” and to trust in God’s plan for them.

“Be open to where God may lead you, because the truth is, God’s calling on your life might take you places you never thought you could go or maybe never wanted to go,” shared Cherney. “But, in my experience, the places I never thought I’d go or wanted to go to have pulled me closer to His presence, given me a sense of purpose and brought me peace that only comes from living out God’s calling on your life.”

President Mark Landes conferred 29 Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees, three Bachelor of Science in aviation – professional pilot degrees, four Bachelor of Arts in business management degrees, one Bachelor of Science in engineering degree, 53 associate degrees and one missional leadership certificate. The graduating class of 2026 includes members from 11 countries



Nursing Professor Denise Diller speaks a blessing of the hands over Alexandria Nickel of Newton, Kan., during Saturday’s Nursing Pinning Ceremony. [Photo by Larry Bartel, Hesston College]

including the U.S.

The prayer of invocation was delivered by President Landes and the prayer of dedication was given by Ben and Susan Miller Setiawan, parents of aviation graduate Sam Setiawan of Goshen, Ind. Two students, Madison Jarvis, associate degree graduate from St. Francisville, La., and Kendall Boughtman, a bachelor’s degree graduate from McPherson, Kan., were nominated by other graduating students and voted on by their peers to address graduates.

Jarvis encouraged graduates to give their worries and anxiety to God in her address centered around Matthew 6:34, “Therefore, do not worry about

tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

“God commands us to not worry, that is the reason to have hope in his plans,” explained Jarvis. “God calls us to be present to live our lives in him because he is with us here and now. As we navigate through this life journey there will be struggles, setbacks, crisis, sickness and difficulties. But we must realize there is beauty in our present moments.”

Boughtman reflected on the community she found in her time at Hesston and the mixed emotions of leaving it behind.

“If anyone in this room is considering



2026 graduates Evelyn Gaertner of Newton, Kan., Misaki Kurata of Osaka, Japan, and Abby Hamm of Coldwater, Kan., pose for a photo before Hesston College’s 116th Commencement ceremony held May 16. [Photo by Larry Bartel/Hesston College]

Hesston College, this is your sign,” encouraged Boughtman. “You will find more than an education here. You will gain a community of friends, and even family. And that is what makes today so bittersweet. It is the end of an era, but the exciting start of something new.”

The 29 nursing program graduates were honored at a Nursing Pinning ceremony in the sanctuary of Hesston Mennonite Church on the morning of May 16. Graduates received their nursing pins as well as the traditional blessing of hands from Hesston College nursing faculty.

Other commencement weekend events included several music recitals and a theatre showcase. A concert in honor of longtime faculty member Ken Rodgers titled Music and Memories was held on the evening of May 15.

Kansas Dillons stores among those cited in Clean Air Act violations, receive \$2.5 million penalty

By: Morgan Chilson
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TOPEKA — The Kroger Co., which operates Dillons stores in Kansas, will pay a \$2.5 million penalty for failing to properly manage refrigerant chemicals used in its 2,700 stores, in violation of the Clean Air Act.

Kroger failed to properly use ozone-depleting refrigerants at some of its stores and manufacturing facilities, exceeding limits set by the federal government, according to a complaint filed by the U.S. Department of Justice in April.

The ozone-depleting substances, or

ODS, are used in commercial refrigeration appliances for food display, in industrial processes to manufacture food products and in some air conditioning equipment, the complaint said.

“The settlement resolves Kroger’s failure to promptly repair refrigerant equipment leaks of the refrigerant R-22, a powerful ozone-depleting hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC), between 2014 and 2023,” the DOJ said in a news release. “Kroger also failed to keep adequate refrigeration service records.”

ODS migrate into the stratosphere, where ultraviolet radiation converts them into gases that destroy ozone, the DOJ complaint said.

“The depletion of ozone results in less protection from the sun’s rays and more exposure to UVB radiation, which can cause the development of skin cancer and cataracts,” the complaint said.

A Topeka Dillons store, located at 4015 SW 10th Ave, was one of 22 stores that had leak violations. The leak occurred from August 2015 to January 2016.

A Topeka Dillons store at 6829 SW 29th St. and a Dillons store in Garden City at 1305 E. Kansas Ave. were two of 10 stores cited for failing to keep records of how much refrigerant was added to their systems.

In an agreement filed April 29,

Kroger agreed to enter a refrigerant compliance management plan for all of the refrigeration equipment it operates. The company also agreed to a plan to convert appliances using ODS chemicals to more modern and safer refrigerant products and to meet a 9.5% or below leak rate for ODS chemicals.

“Under the proposed consent decree, Kroger will spend an estimated \$100 million over the next three years to reduce coolant leaks from refrigerators and other equipment and improve company-wide compliance with rules protecting the Earth’s ozone layer,” a release from the U.S. Department of Justice said.