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BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

FRIDAY, August 14, 2020

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SULLIVAN COUNTY BOE



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The Sullivan County School Board listens to Kyle Ratliff during the public comment section of their meeting on Thursday night. The meeting was held at Sullivan Central High School so social distancing guidelines could be observed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

TOUGH DECISIONS

Parents, teachers beg school board for different school reopening plans

BY SARAH WADE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — For the first time in months since the COVID-19 pandemic struck the region, the Sullivan County Board of Education opened its monthly meeting to the public. The public had a lot to say.

At least 50 people showed up to the meeting, which was held in the gymnasium of Sullivan Central High School. Everyone appeared to be wearing the recommended masks, and attendees sat spaced out among the bleachers.

In a called virtual meeting on Aug. 7, the school board had voted to keep county schools on a virtual learning schedule through Aug. 21.

Their plan as of that meeting would have Sullivan County's schools open on Aug. 24, either in a hybrid (part-virtual, part-in-person) format or fully in person.

One by one at Thursday's meeting, parents and educators made their way down to the microphone facing the board members — who were seated in a half-circle of tables set up on the basketball court — and shared their opinions about that decision.

For the most part, their opinions fell into two camps: The parents, along with one high school student who spoke, pleaded with the board to reopen the school buildings. The educators argued that it was unsafe to

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DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Sullivan County School Board Chairman Michael Hughes speaks with other board members during Thursday night's BOE meeting.

Virginia: Ballad providing public advantage

BY DAVID MCGEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

The Virginia Department of Health recently concurred with its Tennessee counterpart that Ballad Health is providing a public advantage under the terms of a merger approved by both states.

Virginia issued its annual review of Ballad Health, which follows a Tennessee report issued in April. Ballad was formed in 2018 from the union of Mountain States Health Alliance and Wellmont Health System under the terms of a Certificate of Public Advantage in Tennessee and Cooperative Agreement in Virginia. The merger was permitted so long as the benefits of the merged entity outweighed the lack of competition and each state is responsible for annually reviewing the merger through a number of metrics.

"I find that the benefits of the Cooperative Agreement for the period of FY 2019, and likely to result in the future, continue to outweigh the disadvantages attributable to a reduction in competition resulting from the Cooperative Agreement," Virginia Health Commissioner Dr. Norman Oliver wrote in the cover letter accompanying his department's 30-page assessment.

The report cites a number of improvements made during the past fiscal year, including plans to increase nursing salaries \$100 million over 10 years, implement "multiple billing and charging policies to reduce the burden of health cost to the

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ONLINE

To read all of the 2020 reports on the Ballad Health merger, visit **Herald-Courier.com**.

Trump admits he's blocking postal cash to stop surge in mail-in votes

BY DEB RIECHMANN
and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump frankly acknowledged Thursday that he's starving the U.S. Postal Service of money in order to make it harder to process an expected surge of mail-in

ballots, which he worries could cost him the election.

In an interview on Fox Business Network, Trump explicitly noted two funding provisions that Democrats are seeking in a relief package that has stalled on Capitol Hill. Without the additional money, he said, the Postal

Service won't have the resources to handle a flood of ballots from voters who are seeking to avoid polling places during the coronavirus pandemic.

"If we don't make a deal, that means they don't get the money,"

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Weather » A10

COVID-19

PANDEMIC

| LOCATION | #CASES | #DEATHS |
|---------------|-------------|----------|
| Worldwide | 20,750,000+ | 752,000+ |
| United States | 5,200,000+ | 167,000+ |
| Virginia | 103,622 | 2,363 |
| Tennessee | 128,511 | 1,313 |

SOURCES: Johns Hopkins, Virginia and Tennessee Departments of Health, AP

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