



DEPARTMENT CHANGES COMING FOR PINAL COUNTY

Wendy Petersen, formerly from the Pinal County Attorney's Office, took her position as the Director of Pinal County's Human Resource Department on January 1, 2012. She has been practicing law for over 25 years and specializes in employment law for the past 15 years. Petersen has represented multiple departments from Pinal County, and previously Pima County, focusing mostly on the Pinal and Pima County Sheriff Departments. Petersen acquired her undergraduate degree from Washington University in St. Louis and a law degree from John Marshall Law School in Chicago. "I've practiced law for 26 years, some of it has been pretty tedious," Petersen said. "This new position gives me the chance to be a public servant without having to practice law, it's a big change but I'm up to the challenge." Michael Arnold, the predecessor to Petersen, retired abruptly following the release of a report from the Pinal County Office of Internal Audit noted that changes had to be made to department policy. Petersen has said that her top priority is to implement the new changes. "A lot of the policies need to be updated or tweaked and brought in line with federal, state or county statutes," Petersen said, "This is something I'm absolutely dedicated to." An audit of the County's employee benefits administration back in 2011 to determine if the internal controls on the administration of employee benefits was adequate. The audit found that this is not always the case. Employees of Pinal County receive their health benefits from a partially self-funded program that is overseen by a trust. This is according to Heather Murphy, the Pinal County Communications Manager. "There are clear ties between HR and the decision making that occurs at the Trust," Murphy said. Since IA was formed back in 2007, this is the first time an audit had been performed on the administration of the employee benefits program. The budget for the trust fund was \$19 million in 2011 for all employee benefits. This includes pharmacy, dental, health, disability, vision and life insurance. The report from the audit noted potential problems in the areas of evaluation of services provided, travel, contracting and medical leave. "I've litigated employment cases, I know what's open to charges," Petersen said. "I can take steps to alleviate issues before they arise." Petersen has also begun to review the merit system that judges employees within the county. "One of my goals is to update the merit rules to streamline the process," she said, "Presently the situation can arise where a great deal of time elapses between the hearing and the results. A system that is unnecessarily slow isn't doing anyone any good," she said, "I want to make sure the medical appeal process is streamlined." County Manager Fritz Behring emphasized the importance of transparency as the county moves forward. "Those are my marching orders moving forward, it may be an overused phrase but it is a very real metaphor," she said. "I'm ready for the task."

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