

Commissioners Smoked Over Smoky Board

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The protest—albeit to deaf ears—continued last night from the Watauga County Board of Commissioners over actions taken to restructure the board of Smoky Mountain Center, action that eliminates representation on their board from Watauga and Wilkes, two of the larger counties in the original service area. Commissioners were further disgusted that the now closed agency serving the far western end of the state—Western Highlands—got equal seats on the newly-reconstituted board, a move questioned by commission chair Nathan Miller, “So half of their people got on the board.” And board representative to the Smoky Board, commissioner Billy Kennedy, agreed, “Yes, and I brought that issue up too, as well. And I said that and they responded about the equal population numbers. So it didn’t really address the failure of Western Highlands and why they got equal seats on the board.” In what appeared an exercise in futility, the commission voted on the change, unanimously opposed to the new Smoky board. There has been tension expressed by Watauga and Wilkes commissioners over actions taken by Smoky Mountain Center since taking over as the Medicaid administrative body for the area, Wilkes Commissioners even voting to seek to pay local provider Daymark directly instead of passing money through to Smoky. Meanwhile, the state is seeking to reduce what was 11 such agencies set up by the previous administration in Raleigh to as few as three such agencies to administer the Federal money pass-through, and Smoky administration has stated they want to be one of the remaining agencies.