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July 29, 2020

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Rappahannock Area Health District Interim Director Returns to Retirement; New Interim Director Announced

(Fredericksburg, Virginia) -- The Virginia Department of Health's Rappahannock Area Health District (RAHD), will have a new Interim Health Director beginning August 1st, as current Interim Director Dr. Donald Stern returns to retirement.

"It has truly been a pleasure to work with the team at the Rappahannock Area Health District over the past 5 months," says Dr. Stern. "While COVID-19 has posed an ongoing challenge to our community and to public health statewide, the RAHD team has risen to the occasion and showed a tremendous level of dedication, professional expertise and care for our citizens in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and preserving life in this community. At the same time, they continued to provide other essential public health services such as maternity care, family planning services and residential onsite sewage program."

Stern, who served as acting State Health Commissioner in the mid-90s and local health director in a number of districts statewide during his more than forty years with the Virginia Department of Health, retired from the Richmond City Health District in 2016. He came out of retirement in March to lead RAHD during the COVID-19 response.

Dr. Stern will be succeeded in this role by Dr. Denise Bonds, the current Health Director for the Thomas Jefferson Health District (TJHD). Dr. Bonds will continue to serve in her role with TJHD while also acting as the Interim Director for RAHD.

"I am pleased to have the opportunity to again support this community," said Dr. Bonds. "The coming weeks and months will prove to be an important time as we respond to COVID-19, and I look forward to leading the Rappahannock Area Health District in this response as well as other health district activities."

Dr. Bonds has served in her role as the TJHD Health Director for five and a half years. Prior to joining the Virginia Department of Health, Dr. Bonds served as a medical officer at the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute.

In addition to the transition in leadership, RAHD is expanding its staff capacity to continue a robust response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, 26 contract employees have been brought on to augment existing RAHD staff in case investigation, contact tracing, epidemiology, emergency coordination, community outreach, public information, data management and administrative roles. Hiring these individuals will enable RAHD to resume full public health services including clinical, community health promotion/disease prevention and environmental health services by mid-September.

For information on RAHD and services currently available, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/rappahannock/. For more information on COVID-19 in Virginia, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/.