



Media Release

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Keesa M. Smith Tapped as DHS Deputy Director

The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) has tapped Keesa M. Smith to serve as a deputy director of the agency, citing her leadership in turning around the state's Board of Review and her ability to tackle complex issues as crucial to her selection.

Smith, 32, also worked closely with DHS staff and developed knowledge about many of the agency's programs and services during the time that she oversaw the state's federal stimulus program for Governor Mike Beebe.

"Keesa has proven time and again that she's more than capable of taking on any challenge, and she does so while earning the respect of those around her," said DHS Director John Selig. "She is exactly the kind of leader we were looking for in our next deputy director."

In that position, Smith will oversee five of the agency's 10 divisions, specifically the divisions of Aging and Adult Services, Youth Services, Child Care and Early Childhood Education, Community Service and Nonprofit Support, and Services for the Blind.

"My goal has always been to end each day knowing that my work has helped those around me. I cannot think of a better agency to continue that goal than the Department of Human Services," Smith said. "I am excited about the work we will do together."

After earning a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communications from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2002 and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2005, Smith served as a staff attorney for the Center for Arkansas Legal Services. She provided free legal representation and legal education to low-income individuals and families. In February 2008, Smith began her career in Arkansas state government as deputy director of communications for Governor Beebe, later serving as external affairs liaison and then deputy legal counsel.

In February 2010, she also began serving as the state implementation director of the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act. As director, Smith was responsible for ensuring hundreds of millions of dollars in federal stimulus funding were used in accordance with federal guidelines. She left the Governor's office in November 2011 to serve as the chairman and agency director of the Arkansas Board of Review. Under Smith's leadership, the Board of Review eliminated a backlog of more than 4,000 appeals of unemployment claims and reduced the average wait for a decision from a year to 23 days.

Earlier this year, Arkansas Business named Smith one of the 40 under 40 Arkansans to watch.

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Smith's first day with DHS will be in mid-to-late September. She replaces Steven B. Jones, who left in July for the private sector.