

December 7, 2011

Dr. JudyAnn Bigby, Secretary  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
One Ashburton Place, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Secretary Bigby:

As members of the *Department of Mental Health Task Force on Staff and Client Safety* we are pleased to submit testimony regarding the Commonwealth's Fiscal Year 2013 budget. Specifically, we are writing to urge the Patrick Administration to significantly increase funding for the Commonwealth's publicly-funded mental health system, particularly for programs and services funded by the Department of Mental Health and MassHealth.

Commissioner of Mental Health Barbara Leadholm convened the *DMH Task Force on Staff and Client Safety* in February of this year in the immediate aftermath of the tragic death of Stephanie Moulton, a staff member at a DMH-funded community program.

As individuals, we were honored to serve on the Task Force whose charge was to review and systematically assess policies and practices relative to staff and client safety in DMH-funded community services and then to make recommendations to the Department as to how best to improve and promote staff and client safety in DMH-funded programs.

In June, we delivered our final report to Commissioner Leadholm which included seventeen specific recommendations that acknowledged that safety for staff and consumers is inextricably linked to providing a robust array of quality services for individuals in need of such services. Our goal in making these recommendations was to ensure that individuals receiving DMH services have *"meaningful access to a full array of recovery-oriented services and treatment provided by adequate numbers of skilled and experienced hospital and community professionals funded to provide coordinated care as an integrated team."*

Unfortunately, our report noted that years of budget cuts *"have negatively impacted service delivery and safety issues"* in a number of important ways, including reducing the overall array of services available to individuals receiving DMH services.

For this reason, the Task Force recommended that *"The Commonwealth should significantly increase funding over the next five years in the publicly-funded mental health system. This investment should primarily be targeted towards the Department of Mental Health and MassHealth."*

We were very heartened that the state legislature, even before our report was finalized, acknowledged that the DMH system was under-funded by voting to increase funding for the Department by approximately \$20 million in FY12. We were also very pleased that Governor Patrick approved this appropriation in signing the FY12 budget.

Despite this increased funding, however, more funding for public mental health services is necessary to fully implement the recommendations of the *DMH Task Force on Staff and Client Safety*. A recent report issued by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – Massachusetts noted that overall funding for the Department has been cut by over \$55 million since Fiscal Year 2009; according to the report, Massachusetts cut funding for mental health services more than any other New England state. As a leader in health care, we must ensure equitable access to, and the availability of mental health services.

As Task Force members, we were fully aware that the community-based mental health system had been decimated over a series of years and understood that it would take a number of years to undue these cuts and rebuild the community-based system. To address these needs, we specifically noted that “*The Commonwealth should significantly increase funding over the next five years in the publicly-funded mental health system.*”

For this reason, we are now requesting that Governor Patrick include a significant increase in funding for both the Department of Mental Health and MassHealth in his FY13 budget recommendations so that the Commonwealth can fully implement the recommendations our Task Force submitted in June of this year.

Thank you very much for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

**Tina Adams, Ph.D.**

**Vicker V. DiGravio III, President/CEO**  
Association for Behavioral Healthcare

**Toby Fisher, MBA, MSW**  
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