



The State Chapter of the Federation of Families

LET'S TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEPT. OF MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

Last Wednesday, June 8th, I was invited to testify by the Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus, along with Dr. Currier from the Department of Health and Diana Mikula of the Department of Mental Health, at the caucus' hearing on the budget cuts for those departments. The DMH budget information presented was incomplete; it did not address the existing public health crisis or the pending and impending litigation we face.

In addition to what I said at the hearing, and to clarify and inform the public discussion, I offer the following information:

- According to this 2014 Report from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, Mississippi spends less per capita on mental health than almost any other state in the union (\$56 vs a national average of \$124), or less than half the national average.
- That same report reveals that Mississippi, in direct opposition to states that are moving forward with mental health reform, spends 3 out of 4 of its scarce mental health dollars on institutional care. In contrast, other states spend 3 out of 4 dollars on services in the community.
- Why is it important that we provide services in the community? Because evidence shows that children do better in their homes and at school when an array of the right kinds of services and supports exist where they live, play and go to school. Studies have shown that states can save money as reliance on institutional care decreases.
- Many of the children of families in our organization never come into contact with the formal mental health system because the services are inaccessible to them. And our data and organizational experience shows that families frequently do not

find services beneficial or responsive even when they are able to access them. Often children end up in institutions, foster care and jail because the right kinds of services and supports for them do not exist--not because that is the most appropriate setting for their mental health needs.

- Mississippi is being sued because it does not provide the community-based services for children mandated by state and federal law. It is also possible that the state will soon face additional costly litigation from the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) because negotiations to resolve the illegalities of Mississippi's mental health system noted by the DOJ in 2011 failed .
- The State already has two tax-payer funded assessment reports that give expert recommendations on how we can develop helpful mental health services in our communities, but unfortunately, none of us, including the press and the Mississippi Legislature, have access to those reports.
- It's critical that families be partners in developing services and effective polices. This increases the clinical and cost effectiveness of services.
- This guide, also from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, describes how states can develop effective community based services and also how they can avoid costly lawsuits. It encourages states to work with organizations like ours in order to secure adequate funding and develop the right kinds of services in the community.

Over the past four years, including at the budget hearing, I have repeatedly invited the executive director and board of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health to meet with us to begin this conversation, but have never received a formal response to our numerous requests.

Families as Allies stands ready to work with all interested parties to build an effective and efficient system of care for children's mental health in partnership with families, state leaders and policy makers who are courageous and visionary enough to answer this call. Standing together united as families, we will continue to tell the truth about our broken mental health system, and we will not be intimidated.



Dr. Joy Hogge
Executive Director, Families as Allies

Previous Families as Allies press release related to the budget cuts.

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