

**MINUTES
THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TREATMENT ACCESS
LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE**

July 12, 2016

The Behavioral Health Treatment Access Legislative Task Force met at 1:00 p.m., on Tuesday, July 12, 2016, in Room B, MAC, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Task Force members present were: Representative Clarke Tucker, Ms. Carole Baxter, Mr. Mark Thurman, and Dr. David Williams. Senator Jeremy Hutchinson also attended.

Representative Tucker called the meeting to order.

Dr. Williams moved to adopt the minutes for the November 16, 2015 meeting, Ms. Baxter seconded the motion, and without objection the minutes were approved.

Addressing a National Crisis: Too Many People with Mental Illnesses in our Jails

Mr. Mike Thompson, Director, Council of State Governments Justice Center, and Mr. Richard Cho, Director of Behavioral Health, Council of State Governments Justice Center, were recognized to give a presentation regarding mentally ill offenders involved in the criminal justice system. Mr. Thompson stated that according to a 2012 national statistics report, approximately 11.6 million offenders are admitted annually into jails; with 17% of that population reported to have a serious mental health problem. Research shows it is not mental illness but criminogenic risk factors, such as: poor decision making skills, substance abuse, lack of a job, and age that are the attributing factors to jail admissions and recidivism. Counties need good baseline data, appropriate mental health screenings, and an available continuum of care in order to reduce the number of individuals with mental illness in jails. He encouraged counties to focus on reducing the number of people with mental illness in jail, shorten their length of stay, increasing the percentage connected to treatment, and lowering recidivism.

Mr. Cho outlined the Justice Center's "six key questions", which can be used as a strategic tool, for counties to implement a work plan:

1. Jail administrators need a committed leadership team that includes behavioral health providers, community based providers and staff coordinators
2. Counties need a tool to screen and assess mentally ill offenders
3. Counties need baseline data to target effective interventions
4. Counties need a comprehensive gaps analysis to determine adequacy of services
5. Counties need to prioritize policy, practices, and funding to identify gaps within mental health services
6. Counties need a system to track their screening and assessment progress.

Mr. Cho said passing local resolutions is the first critical step in decreasing the mentally ill populations in county jails. He also mentioned several ways states can help mentally ill offenders maintain access to health benefits while transitioning through the criminal justice system. In other states, state funded innovation grants have been set up to help county jails cover Medicaid gaps and to provide crisis intervention training for law enforcement officers. Mr. Cho said other states are using optional Health Home State Plan services or allowing local governments to create their own managed care plans to fund flexible case management services for mentally ill offenders.

In response to Ms. Baxter's question, Mr. Thompson stated each county needs to designate a corrections entity responsible for coordinating appropriate services in a manner that integrates the criminal justice system and health care providers.

Mr. Thompson stated low risk mental ill offenders, who have an acute mental health need, should receive services from the community based mental health system. Mentally ill offenders, who are at higher risk of recidivism and have high treatment needs, should be receiving care under the criminal justice system. Other states have also utilized county human development services to teach local law enforcement officers how to approach and screen someone with a mental illness. He stated hospitals in other states have also partnered with community based health providers and law enforcement by funding positions at crisis centers so as to decrease the number of individuals with mental illness brought into emergency rooms.

Representative Tucker stated the task force needs to focus on improving mental health coordination at the local level.

Senator Jeremy Hutchinson requested that the task force propose how much funding is needed and how to fund each of its recommendations, and that it investigate how to expand the number of providers covered by insurance companies.

Meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.