

**Meeting Minutes of  
The Governor's Council on Behavioral Health  
8:30 A.M., Thursday, May 11, 2006**

The Governor's Council on Behavioral Health met at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 11, 2006, in Barry Hall's Conference Room 126, 14 Harrington Road, Cranston, Rhode Island.

Members Present: Liz Earls, Substitute Chair; Carrie Blake; Linda Bryan; Scotti DiDonato, President Elect of the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island (MHA); Diane Dwyer; Mitch Henderson; Joseph Le; Peter Mendoza; Neil Corkery; H. Reed Cosper; and Representative Bruce Long.

Ex-Officio            Ellen Nelson, Acting Director of MHRH, and Craig Stenning, MHRH; Carol Fox,  
Member Present: DCYF; Fred Friedman, DOC; Marie Straus, Elderly Affairs; and Elizabeth  
                                 Gilheeny, Department of Justice.

Staff:                    Corinna Roy, Charles Williams, Richard Sabo, and Mary Ann Nassa.

The Acting Chair, Liz Earls, called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. After introductions were conducted, Liz entertained a motion to accept the Minutes of April 11, 2006. Mitch Henderson sited a correction to Page 3, Paragraph 3, correcting the amount of 1 billion dollars to be changed to 1 million dollars. Neil Corkery moved to accept the Minutes and Peter Mendoza seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the minutes were approved as amended.

**UPDATE ON STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR STRATEGIC PLAN**

Corinna Roy described a request for funding for strategic planning from the Rhode Island Foundation with the State matching funds and MHA agreeing to help manage the funding by waiving any fees that they would normally get as part of the project. Corinna stated that its deadline was May 1; therefore, the letter of intent was forwarded to everyone for review via e-mail and included with the Minutes of April 11. Liz Earls open discussion and welcomed any questions, requesting a formal vote for ratification of the letter. Neil Corkery moved to ratify and Carrie Blake seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion was carried.

**UPDATE ON MENTAL HEALTH BLOCK GRANT AND PATH GRANT**

Corinna Roy stated that new requirements have been presented, requesting that 40 percent of the Block Grant allocation be directed toward transformation activities. Corinna stated that this is not seen as a barrier for what has traditionally been done; however, most recently she has heard that it will not be included in the current application because it may not be acted upon by Congress until November. The current application is due out in a couple of weeks.

Corinna predicts that what is likely to happen is that the block grant will go on as usual and three months from when it is submitted, an amendment will have to be done to change it to comply with the new transformation requirements. Corinna and George McCahey will be attending the block grant meeting after Memorial Day, and they will find out more about it at that time.

Corinna reported that the PATH Grant, which is a formula grant issued by the federal government for homelessness, is approximately 300,000 dollars. The majority of the funds go to The Providence Center and a subset of the funds goes to Newport Community Mental Health Center. Those funds are used for emergency services and outreach services for homeless people who have serious mental illness. Corinna reported that a new stipulation has been placed on PATH Grant funding that calls for the two centers to work directly with people who are discharged from state detoxification beds and state psychiatric beds. Because readmission rates are very high for some of those people with serious

mental illness who are going into the detoxification beds, it is thought that this might be a way to help them avoid repeating the cycle of readmission. It is suspected that one of the reasons they are being readmitted over and over again is because when they are discharged, they have nowhere to live.

Liz Earls recalled that previously SAMHSA had separate funding for transformation which came out of the President's new Freedom Commission on Mental Health report, and there has been concern, nationally, that those funds seemed to be no longer available. There is also concern that now the transformation initiative is supposed to happen out of existing funding. Liz stated that she was in Washington last week and as a part of their visits to Congress, all the states asked their respective delegations to correspond with SAMHSA, asking that states be given the flexibility to determine how dollars will be used to support transformation. Liz stated that in Rhode Island, with the little pool that is available for emergency services in indigent care now, it can mean that a significant portion of dollars will go to administrative reorganization. Liz further stated that there is some national effort to frame it differently.

Corinna stated that it varies from 3 percent to 60 percent, and in Rhode Island it amounts to 40 percent or about 700,000 dollars.

#### **UPDATES FROM DCYF**

Carol Fox reported that the Emergency Services Committee is reviewing Emergency Services regulations and that they will be published when completed. Janet Anderson suggested to Carol that a representative could attend an upcoming Council meeting to give more details regarding the regulations. Liz Earls added that a public hearing was held for comment on the regulations.

Carol reported that the DCYF Director is meeting with providers to try to develop a new design regarding the Independent Living Program (ILP) for teens and young adults. The age is being moved back from 21 to 19, so they are trying to develop some kind of design to better prepare the kids and hook them up with community services during their transition.

Liz Earls added that there is a proposal in the Governor's budget to cut funding, and as of July they will not be accepting adolescents into the program who are 19 and older.

Carol reported that the Positive Educational Partnership is moving along; and a clinical director and a project director have been hired and they should both be starting in about a month.

Liz Earls reported that DCYF, the Parent Support Network and Rhode Island Violence Prevention Network (RIVPN) hosted the first children's mental health, Mental Health Month kickoff on Monday, May 1 at the State House.

#### **UPDATES FROM MHRH**

Craig Stenning announced that following his report the newly nominated Acting Director of MHRH, Ellen Nelson, would be addressing the Council and will talk about her vision for the Department.

Craig stated that the senior staff of the Department has been briefing Ellen on various issues currently facing MHRH. Craig stated that he looks forward to her leadership and the stability she brings to the Department moving forward.

Craig announced that May is Mental Health Month; he also reported that several activities are planned and that a brochure is available.

Craig mentioned that they continue to work towards what will be the 2007 budget. He stated that the two biggest pieces that may be problematic for the Department are the implementation of the RFP that will combine the purchase of services for psychiatric inpatient beds as well as state-funded detoxification services. The new contract is scheduled to be operational by November 1; therefore, part of the work that is being performed right now is to extend the current contracts so that they both will be in effect until the new contract starts.

Craig stated his concerns with the transition age issue which has become even more troublesome than it has been in the past. He stated that recently there was a meeting between MHRH and DCYF along with representatives from Butler Hospital, Bradley Hospital, and Eleanor Slater Hospital regarding one particular client, an eighteen-year old woman who has been in out-of-state placements since she was fourteen years old.

Craig stated that his hope is for more long-range planning around these kinds of cases, rather than individual-by-individual. This is the second person within the past year that has occupied days and weeks of work and effort. He is concerned about how this kind of situation may increase in the future. He assumes that there are many similar individuals within the system than what is currently known. Craig thinks this is a critical issue that will need to be addressed in the months and years ahead.

Craig reported that the first round of joint monitoring with the community mental health centers (CMHCs) is nearly completed. He stated that monitoring of five of the seven CMHCs has been concluded along with several of the larger substance treatment providers. Craig also reported that two internal meetings have been held in order to learn from what had been accomplished in the initial reviews and to determine what could be changed and improved on. He stated that a workgroup will soon convene and will ask the individual agencies, as well as the major associations that represent them, to look at areas of the regulations that have been in place for a year-and-a-half because some may feel that there are adjustments that need to be made; several of the agencies that have had input have been asked to put it in writing. Liz Earls asked if that would be achieved before completion. Craig stated that in some cases it may only be a matter of interpretation of the current regulations and in some cases it could be a short-term variance, but if it looks as if there needs to be a substantial amendment to a particular regulation, then the process may be opened up now rather than waiting to completion.

Craig reported that the feedback from the Kent Center and East Bay was fairly positive regarding the process and added that it is getting better with regard to the joint process method.

Corinna Roy added that with regard to the Statewide Needs Assessment for the Strategic Plan, the letter of interest mentions the need to incorporate data collection activities. Corinna asked that the group recall any data collection activities that have been conducted within the last two years related to behavioral health by their agency or any agencies that they are aware of. Corinna stated that it could be mental health or substance abuse-related and that it could potentially be used in the strategic plan.

Elizabeth Gilheeny of the Department of Justice stated that the Justice Commission has an extensive database specific to juveniles. This database includes the juvenile arrest rates for a number of crimes including substance abuse. Corinna's e-mail address is [croy@mhrh.ri.gov](mailto:croy@mhrh.ri.gov).

Corinna announced that there are presently several openings on the Council and requested that names of interested individuals be submitted to her. She also stated that consumers and family members are always desirable. Corinna expects Noreen Shawcross from Housing in one slot; beyond that there are

state and federal requirements that there be a certain number of consumers and family members, and that the percentage of Council members who are state employees does not exceed half of the membership. There are some specific slots mandated by position and there are some slots that open. Craig clarified that because the Council fulfills the federal requirement of being the planning council for the Mental Health Block grant, one of the stipulations is that 50 percent or more of the members need to represent consumers and family members.

### **UPDATES FROM DOC**

Fred Friedman reported that about two years ago the federal government passed the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment Crime Reduction Act, and it was passed with no funding attached to it. Fred stated that recently some funding was added. The total funding is 5 million dollars. Fred stated that a RFP was announced with a one-month turnaround time with grant applications due on June 2. The grants are for \$50,000 for planning, \$100,000 for implementation or \$250,000 for planning and implementation over five years. Fred stated that DOC is trying to do something very quickly in cooperation with MHRH. DCYF has also contacted DOC to work together on this.

### **UPDATES FROM ELDERLY AFFAIRS**

Marie Strauss described the Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA) as the smallest state agency with 44 full-time staff people. Marie stated that given the growing population and the number of baby boomers it creates a need for attention.

Marie reported that there was a panel regarding addictions with elders held at Rhode Island College two weeks ago. It focused on all addictive behaviors, particularly gambling, medication misuse, and alcohol abuse among elders. Marie announced that there will be another workshop on gambling issues among the elderly that the Department of Elderly Affairs is cosponsoring at Salve Regina College on June 2. It is an all-day workshop with speakers coming in from out-of-state.

In addition, Marie announced an additional workshop on Friday, May 19 regarding legal medical issues related to guardianship.

Corinna Roy added that the Allied Advocacy Group has been engaged in a study to look at barriers to integrating primary health with behavioral health for elders. Corinna stated that there were two focus groups conducted: one was with physicians and the other one was with elders at a senior center. Those have both been carried out and the transcriptions are near completion and will be analyzed. Corinna plans to have some results to report to the Council in the near future.

### **ELLEN NELSON, ACTING DIRECTOR, MHRH**

Craig Stenning introduced Ellen Nelson, the new Acting Director of MHRH. Introductions were conducted. Ellen Nelson stated that it was her pleasure to come and meet everyone on the Council, and commended the Council for all their efforts and is looking forward to working together.

Ellen stated that as she comes into the Department, her initial impressions are that the amount of work and effort that has gone on over the years is stunning. She respects the important work that has been accomplished and feels it is important to build on it. She is looking forward to going through her confirmation process which for the end of May. Once that is done, she will then be working with staff, as well members of the community, to plan for what needs to be done going into the future. She stated that there are some things that she already recognizes need attention. The whole system that is in place for responding to individuals with developmental disabilities is one area that needs to be looked at. She plans to do this fairly quickly. She is trying to meet with everybody and hopes to engage with the appropriate parties within the community and the representatives of the legislature and folks in the private and public sector to come up with an assessment and a plan for the future.

She stated that it's been decided not to fill leadership positions within Developmental Disabilities until the agenda is understood. Once the agenda is understood, the types of skills and capabilities that are needed will be identified in order to go forward.

Ellen stated that the Hospital system includes a good amount of services in the behavioral health area. She possesses a long history in terms of hospitals. Her most immediate position prior coming to Rhode Island was as Associate Commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health with one of her areas of responsibility being the four public-health hospitals, two of which had both psychiatric and medical services. She stated that the challenges at the hospital level of the continuum of care are striking today, and although there is a great resource here in Rhode Island, the question is if the structure is correct for the future.

She is very interested in the thinking that has brought substance abuse and mental health together under the umbrella of behavioral health. She recognizes that even in the field there is a lot of controversy about it. Ellen also mentioned her concern regarding the transition between children's and adult mental health services, which is something she is very interested in.

Ellen believes that the integration of health and mental health at all levels, including the behavioral piece of an individual's health status, is of particular importance going into the future, and may allow achievements that today we might be skeptical about achieving because of limited resources. She recalled that when you look historically at points where there have been limited financial resources, creativity often would occur and bring us to a level that was not imaginable. Ellen stated that this is her hope, and she plans to roll up her sleeves and work with everyone and is glad to meet with anyone and would be happy to participate in the Governor's Council. She stated her enthusiasm and energy and assures that whatever she comes in contact with she will add a little momentum to and is glad to offer whatever she can to this already great system.

### **OLD/NEW BUSINESS**

Elizabeth Earls announced that on June 5<sup>th</sup> Congressman Kennedy and Brown University are hosting an all-day conference at Brown entitled, *New Frontiers*, about behavioral health and innovations and where that whole field is going. Liz will forward the registration form with all the details to Corinna Roy and if anyone is interested, she asked that they contact Corinna at 462-0455 or [croy@mhrh.ri.gov](mailto:croy@mhrh.ri.gov).

Craig Stenning reported that disaster planning is another activity of the Division and to the Governor's credit Rhode Island is ahead of all the other states in working with partner agencies in the community to look at what the ramifications would be if the Pandemic Flu actually comes to fruition. Craig stated that each licensed agency in Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities has been asked to submit an emergency plan for their agency. The goal is to determine how to provide funding and service support to agencies attempting to have enough staff available to continue some level of face-to-face services and to provide the financial underpinning for many of these agencies to make sure they exist when the crisis is over. Some issues of particular concern are the community medication program, the 3,000 people receiving methadone treatment, how to get those supplies in, how to stockpile, and how to prepare all of the groups homes. Craig stated that it is not known when this situation may occur, but it is thought to be possible to hit the west coast some time in the fall of this year, but whether or not there will be human-to-human transmission has not been determined. Craig also stated that this work did not exist five or six years ago, and began just prior to September 11 and intensified from there on, hitting home after the Station Fire. Craig reported that with the headlines that are occurring right now with the Station Fire relived, they are witnessing some of the post-traumatic syndrome (PTS) and emotional aftermath surfacing again.

Marie Strauss reported that DEA was the first department to submit a Continuity of Operations Plan (COP), and last year a public awareness program for seniors and senior centers was initiated. There was a tremendous response among seniors to learn what would happen in a pandemic or any emergency. Marie stated that it is of great concern to DEA because they have also initiated a process of providing technical assistance to the agencies with which they have contracts. Marie reported that there is a Special Populations Committee at the Emergency Management Agency that is looking at issues of the disabled and also looking at a voluntary registry of people who may be at the highest risk. One of the DEA's greatest concerns is those who live in Section 8 Housing with almost 20,000 people who are not only elderly but disabled. DEA is looking for help from Rhode Island Housing or any agency that is concerned about that population in presenting workshops on how to be prepared.

Craig Stenning announced that a table-top exercise will be conducted and then a mock exercise around this issue, along with a regional exercise as well.

Craig Stenning announced that MHRH is kicking off a substantial advertising campaign around underage drinking. The ads will be broadcast on television and radio.

Craig updated the Council on the efforts to have the last year of the implementation of the SIG grant for Prevention approved by the federal government. Craig reported that interim approval was just received to continue until October which closes the gap to eight months. Craig stated that because we have gone beyond the initial limit of the grant, federal approval is necessary. Congressman Kennedy, his staff and Senator Chafee and Senator Reed have been active in supporting efforts to get the federal approval. Charles Williams added that we expect to hear something by August.

Craig reported the federal government issued an award announcement for another round of COSIG State Incentive Grants for co-occurring disorders. There will two awards throughout the country and Rhode Island will apply.

Elizabeth Gilheeny welcomes any input from the members of the Council as to gaps in services in order to allocate \$150,000 which has been made available under the heading of Juvenile Mental Health 2007 planning.

Liz Earls stated the *Providence Journal* reported that the initial results of the revenue estimating for Rhode Island indicate that there is some more money, but not enough to cover what is expected to be a large deficit. Liz stated that we need to be mindful that there are very significant cuts facing the service system that are going to be devastating.

#### **ADJOURNMENT AND NEXT MEETING**

There was no further business. Upon motion made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 10:15 a.m. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for **Tuesday, June 13, at 1:00 p.m. in the first floor Conference Room 126 at the Barry Hall Building.**

Minutes respectfully recorded and written by:

Mary Ann Nassa  
Secretary, Governor's Council on Behavioral Health