



MHA Legislative Update March 10, 2017

The 2017 Legislative Session has begun! We had a big first week in Tallahassee: a press conference in the House Media Room at the Capitol, over 25 meetings with our Senate and House legislators, and a great coalition formed between MHA, NAMI, Florida Mental Health Counselors Association, Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association, Children's Home Society, and Otsuka Pharmaceuticals. See additional details below.

Since SB12, the most comprehensive mental health bill in decades, passed last year and is currently still being implemented, we do not expect as many bills being filed for mental health as we had last year. This is a good thing. We want to allow SB12 to fully roll out before we start adding new legislation. The big push this year centers upon FUNDING. There are rumors about funding cuts, however, the Governor's proposed budget includes a \$25 million increase to mental health funding. We are obviously in support of the Governor's budget.

Mental Health Press Conference:



MHA of Northeast Florida joined forces with MHA of Central Florida, NAMI Florida, Florida Mental Health Counselors Association, Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association, Children's Home Society, Otsuka Pharmaceuticals and 12 bipartisan Florida State Representatives and Senators to urge our legislators to increase Florida's mental health funding. Local residents, Rick and Kathy Marquis, shared their story of having a son who lives with schizophrenia. See their story at the end of this update.

I was also on Jacksonville's Channel 4 Morning Show to discuss mental health funding:
<http://www.news4jax.com/news/morning-show/mental-health-crisis-1489156483048>

Please tune in to Melissa Ross' First Coast Connect on Tuesday, March 14th as I and Jonathan Harriford discuss the impact of an underfunded mental health system.

News Stories about the Press Conference From the State of Florida:

Orlando Sentinel

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-mental-health-budget-cuts-20170309-story.html>

SunSentinel

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-mental-health-care-20170310-story.html>

Miami Herald

<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/nakedpolitics/2017/03/mental-health-crisis-demands-more-state-money-lawmakers-urge.html>

Tampa Bay Times

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/the-buzz-florida-politics/mental-health-crisis-demands-more-state-money-lawmakers-urge/2315994>

WCTV Tallahassee

<http://www.wctv.tv/content/news/Mental-health-leaders-are-worried-about-budget-cuts-415825313.html>

Florida Politics

<http://floridapolitics.com/archives/233641-mental-health>

Tallahassee Democrat

<http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2017/03/09/lawmakers-call-mental-health-help/98960080/>

<http://www.tallahassee.com/videos/news/politics/2017/03/09/watch-lawmakers-ask-budget-cuts-not-include-mental-health-programs/98969204/>

Meetings in Tallahassee

MHA also teamed up with Erica Whitfield and Louise Sutherland-Hoyt from the Florida Mental Health Counselors Association and met with dozens of Florida's legislators to ensure that they all have a full understanding of Florida's current mental health system. We focused on meetings with our Health Care Appropriations Committee members educating them on the importance of adding funding to our general revenue dollars.

One Big Concern

The Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee met Wednesday and outlined their budget cut recommendations. They recommended cutting \$8.2 million from DCF which includes eliminated 8 Community Action Teams (CAT) teams. Two of the eight teams were Child Guidance Center in Jacksonville and BayCare (they presented at the 2016 Florida

Mental Health Summit). We need to come together to ensure the funding is not cut for these critical services that are being provided in our communities.

Mental Health Bills

There are a few bills that we are closely following right now:

HB 1327 by Rep. Peters- Relating to Behavioral Health Services – Behavioral Health Services: Authorizes DCF to approve receiving systems for behavioral health care; requires DCF to post certain data on its website; creates Substance Abuse & Mental Health (SAMH) Safety Net Network; provides for DCF & AHCA to determine scope of services offered; requires AHCA to contract with managing entities or their representatives to implement delivery of community mental health & substance abuse services to certain Medicaid-eligible individuals; provides for determination of rates for services & development of payment mechanisms; specifies that certain court hearings must be scheduled within 5 court working days unless continuance is granted; provides for AHCA to seek certain federal matching funds.

Companion Bill:

SB 358 by Senator Garcia - Relating to Mental Health and Substance Abuse - Authorizing the Department of Children and Families to approve receiving systems for behavioral health care; deleting an obsolete provision requiring a report by the department and the Agency for Health Care Administration; requiring the department to post certain data on its website; specifying that certain court hearings must be scheduled within 5 court working days unless a continuance is granted, etc.

SB 1756 by Senator Garcia - Relating to Examination and Treatment of Individuals with Mental Illness - Examination and Treatment of Individuals with Mental Illness; Providing responsibilities of the Department of Children and Families for a comprehensive statewide mental health and substance abuse program; revising rights of individuals receiving mental health treatment and services to provide for the use of health care surrogates or proxies to make decisions; designated receiving facilities to permit access authority to an agency designated by the Governor to serve as the federally mandated protection and advocacy system for individuals with disabilities, etc.

SB 634 By Senator Campbell- Relating to Involuntary Examinations Under the Baker Act - Involuntary Examinations Under the Baker Act; Authorizing physician assistants and advanced registered nurse practitioners to execute a certificate under certain conditions stating that he or she has examined a person and finds the person appears to meet the criteria for involuntary examination, etc.

Companion Bill:

HB 645 by Representative Lee - Relating to Involuntary Examinations Under the Baker Act - Involuntary Examinations Under the Baker Act: Authorizes physician assistants & advanced registered nurse practitioners to execute certificate under certain conditions.

If anyone would like more specific details on a certain bill or ways to get involved, please don't hesitate to contact me at denise@mhajax.org or (904) 738-8426.

A request for the parents among you. For the next three minutes please, try to walk in our shoes.

Our nightmare began at 3:15 AM with a panicked phone call from our son. He said he was lost, bleeding from his eyes, ears and nose, and people were trying to kill him. That, nine years ago.

My mission. Provide a first hand look at living in a state ranked 49th of 50 for support of those families, who through no fault of their own, are having their lives destroyed by mental illness.

For credibility. I am a retired Navy Commander, including two Vietnam combat flying tours, and a second career with Federal Express Corp. My wife is a retired Clay County teacher, finishing at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. We both have a master's level education.

Our son had a good start. Growing up in a nuclear family, a marriage of now 38 years, he achieved Eagle Scout, a substantial scholarship to a university in Florida and completed his undergraduate degree. His first psychotic break at 21, a common age for the onset of Schizophrenia, and estimated to inflict 1 in 100 individuals. During emergency hospitalizations, he never tested positive for drugs--he did not do this to himself. That is why I continue writing editorials fighting the stigma associated with Schizophrenia—a medically verified disease.

To help you better understand a psychotic break. Just before Hurricane Mathew hit, our 30-year-old son suffered the worst manic-psychotic episode we have ever witnessed. When a 300-pound 30-year-old takes on his father, a 165-pound 70-year-old, the results cannot be pretty. I ended up with a few bruises in the fray, but fared better than my wife. An accident resulting from that melee sent her to the emergency room.

Following his brief hospitalization for treatment of that episode, our son had two options—the street or our home. Florida had no public institutions he could go to, and private facilities are \$1,000 per day. Knowing he could not survive on the street, I sent my wife to stay with friends, and navigated this dangerous situation on my own. We got through it. Sadly, not all families do.

Now, in first hand terms, what 49th of 50 really means. When my son was approaching a psychotic break, he agreed to go to a hospital rather than be Baker Acted. I called five hospitals checking bed availability. Nothing available, with one major hospital telling me they had two patients camped out in the waiting room waiting for beds. My wife and I went on a split shift suicide watch. The reality, we were not qualified to safely handle that situation. One of many reasons why health specialists have all recommended we move out of Florida. And by the way, as a Floridian, I am not particularly proud of that fact.

I close with a parent's ultimate dilemma. In a conversation with my son when he was visibly depressed, he said I could not imagine what it was like to hear voices telling him he was no good, had no future and should kill himself. God knows, he was right. My wife and I are totally committed to helping our son for the rest of our lives. That, sadly, is not the real problem. The terrifying question we and other families like us fear is: Who will be there for our children when we have passed on? Thank you.

Richard & Kathleen Marquis, St. Augustine, FL.