

TO: Members, Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes

FROM: Sheila B. Amdur, Keep the Promise Coalition

RE: PROPOSED AREAS OF FOCUS

DATE: December 14, 2009

I am testifying today on behalf of the more than 30 organizations of consumer, family, advocacy, and professional supporters of the Keep the Promise Coalition, the largest mental health coalition in the state dedicated to improving the lives of people who confront the challenges of serious mental illnesses in their daily lives.

May we first thank you for your work to look beyond the "quick fixes" and often circular, dead end solutions to address the state's serious budget situation. Only by examining ways to improve government, to move beyond the "conventional wisdom" that often keeps us from innovative and more effective ways of administering government, will we as a state in the long run address the growth of state spending.

I would like to particularly address several of the proposals in your Report:

16. "The Steering Function": I would suggest that the Commission frame this slightly differently by being population focused. Your first recommendation concerned making state human service funding "more consumer driven, efficient, accountable, and transparent." This should then be applied to those populations, such as people in prison with serious mental illnesses, children with serious mental health issues, and adults with serious mental illnesses in prisons. Each of these groups crosses multiple state department areas of responsibility. OPM could chair Task Forces of appropriate state agencies related to each of these populations, develop combined funding approaches, and determine how Medicaid could be used to pay for community supports and treatment that would reduce the need for expensive institutionalization. Some of this planning has occurred, for example, in the criminal justice area, but has not been rigorous enough in terms of integrated programming and funding. The answer, however, is not to then proceed to develop a mega Human Services agency; "the bigger they are", the more likely they are to fail!

17. The Keep the Promise Coalition has for the last decade hammered away at the unnecessary, inhumane, and costly incarceration of people with serious mental illnesses convicted of non-violent, low level crimes, often directly related to their lack of services and housing. Again Medicaid can play a major role in financing basic services for this population. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has operated an effective jail diversion population related to the adult population, but has been severely hampered in not being able to divert almost half of those they evaluate for the courts because of the lack of services and housing.

27. The Keep the Promise Coalition has also for the last decade documented the revenue the state could obtain by billing Medicaid for community based rehabilitation services

for people with serious mental illnesses. We are a "land of steady habits", which in this case has only led us down a path of not gaining the federal reimbursement we could obtain for these services. Using Medicaid as a payment source for services will also lead to more accountability, since Medicaid requires documentation of medical necessity for services provided.

32. Long term health care costs, especially nursing homes, account for almost one half of the Medicaid budget. The Keep the Promise Coalition has extensively documented and brought to public attention the rapid growth of younger people with serious mental illnesses being placed in nursing homes. This is an example of what happens when community services are cut and housing is not available. If someone has a serious disability and cannot manage totally on their own, they will go to a more expensive level of care--hospitals, nursing homes, institutions, prisons. The Department of Social Services and the Department of Mental and Addiction Services have cooperated on an 1115 Medicaid waiver aimed at discharging about 200 people from nursing homes over the next three years. However, this will not even stop or significantly slow the rate of growth of admissions to nursing homes, especially with the cuts we have seen to this year's mental health budget. This waiver must be expanded. The funds we are now using to finance nursing home care could be transferred to community care, with a slowing of the growth of long term health costs over time.

I hope that the Legislature and the Governor will continue to work intensively and seriously on the kinds of solutions that will enhance the quality of life in our state, and help us more effectively and efficiently provide for the needs of vulnerable citizens in our state.