

Department of Mental Health Inpatient Study Commission
Public Hearing
Northern Essex Community College, Haverhill
June 12, 2009

This was the last of five scheduled hearings of the DMH Inpatient Study Commission. It was held at Northern Essex Community College, Technology Center, 100 Elliott Street, Haverhill, MA, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Commission members attending included: Marylou Sudders and James Brett, Co-chairs, John Bove, Philip Hadley, Cathy Levin, Jim Durkin, John Scibak, and Robert Gittens.

Ms. Sudders called the meeting to order, introduced members of the Commission, and articulated the Commission's goals. The current economic downturn and resulting fiscal realities has created a set of challenges for the Department that include:

- an immediate structural deficit of \$24M;
- an already significant reduction to DMH community services; and
- more than 200 of 788 adult patients are ready for community services.

Ms. Sudders posed four questions to public hearing participants:

1. How should the Department balance its vision of Community First (defined as supporting persons with mental illness so that they can live independently in the community) with the need for adult inpatient capacity?
2. Given current budget challenges, should the Department increase community based resources by reducing its adult inpatient capacity?
3. In evaluating the Department's adult inpatient system, how should inpatient resources be prioritized?
4. How can the Department best serve individuals transition from its adult inpatient system to less restrictive, more independent living in the community?

Approximately 30 persons attended the hearing. The following 12 individuals testified before the Commission:

Eileen Simon
Conradsimon.org
(see submitted written testimony, sent via email)

Walter Noons
Disability Law Center
(see submitted written testimony, post hearing)

Eugene J. Fierman
Massachusetts Psychiatric Society
(see submitted written testimony)

James Purdy
North East Hospital Corporation
(see submitted written testimony)

Albert Scott
Mental Health Association of Greater Lowell

Peter Keller
National Empowerment Center
(see submitted written testimony)

Laurie Martinelli
NAMI
(see submitted written testimony, post hearing)

David Matteodo
Massachusetts Association of Behavioral Health Systems
(see submitted written testimony)

Margaret Wilson
Office of State Representative James R. Miceli

Dennis Ratliff
Massachusetts Hospital Association
(see submitted written testimony)

Christopher Busby
Citizen/M-Power

Joanna Fortna
President Essex North DMH Site Board

Responding to testimony given by Margaret Wilson from Rep. Miceli's office, Commission Co-Chair, Marylou Sudders reminded participants that individuals receiving care at state hospitals are patients not inmates.

Commission members asked questions of several people who testified regarding their testimony including, but not limited to:

- forensic admissions;
- hospital community benefits for individuals with mental illness;
- readmission rates to acute and general hospitals;
- length of stay issues and insurance coverage; and
- reimbursement rates for psychiatric services/disparity between medical and psychiatric rates.