

## Testimony

### JUDICIAL PROCESS COMMITTEE Wednesday, February 10, 2010

#### Representative Shirley Meyer, Chairman

Madam Chairman and members of the Judicial Process Committee, my name is Susan Rae Helgeland and I am Executive Director, Mental Health America of ND (MHAND). MHAND's mission is to promote mental health through education, advocacy, understanding and access to quality care for all individuals.

On January 28, 2010 the MHAND Board of Directors met and voted to not take a position on the 24 or 72 hour hold issue. Over the last several years that this issue has come before the ND State Legislature, the MHAND board has arrived at the same conclusion and not taken a position. The reason is that the members of the board have differing opinions and cannot reach consensus. I believe that this is evidence of the challenge and complexity of the issue.

I would like to suggest that consumers be consulted directly as to their opinion of the 24 or 72 hour hold through contact with the eight regional recovery centers throughout ND. MHAND would be happy to help in that effort. We see it as an opportunity for the consumer voice to be heard and taken into consideration.

MHAND has concerns about delivery of services in rural ND for farm and ranch producers and their family members as well as individuals on the reservations. MHAND is aware that inpatient psychiatric services are not available in Dickinson. I recently heard from a family who reported transport of their family member to MedCenter One from Dickinson. The concern expressed was the family member was handcuffed and transported with other prisoners in the same vehicle. I explained the need for handcuffs related to security of the patient as well as the driver of the vehicle. The family member understood that but could not understand the transport of their loved one with prisoners in the vehicle. It would be better if inpatient services could be provided in the community of Dickinson.

MHAND has heard that people on the reservation who are ready to accept treatment must travel to one of the regional human services centers to go through a screening process for admittance to the ND State Hospital. Transportation and lodging is sometimes an issue for these individuals and they end up staying with family members and not getting the services they need.

Through a grant from the National Mental Health America organization, MHAND has identified two target areas to address the barriers to access behavioral (mental health and substance use) in rural ND. One is the Federally Qualified Health Care Center, Coal Country Clinic, Beulah, ND and the other Three Affiliated Tribes at New Town, ND. Real people will be telling their stories. The real people include behavioral health providers, patients and family members. We are calling it the Behavioral Health Initiative (BHI).

A second part of the BHI project is the delivery of culturally competent behavioral health curriculum to primary care and mid level providers at the Coal Country Clinic and Three Affiliated Tribes. MHAND feels that this is part of the solution since we know that it is difficult to find and keep behavioral health care providers in the rural communities. Primary and mid level care providers are already diagnosing and treating patients for behavioral health concerns. The curriculum could be helpful and, if outcomes are positive, the BHI project may be replicated in other parts of rural ND.

MHAND is pleased that the following people have agreed and have already met three times as an Advisory Council for the BHI project.

The members of the ND-BHI Advisory Council are: Karen Larson, ND Director, Dakota HealthCare Association; Teresa Snyder Grant, Okiciya (O KEE CHEE A) Consulting; Mike Watson, KAT Communications; Gail Erickson, ND Department of Health; Jarret Baker, Boys and Girls Club Director, Three Affiliated Tribes; Senator Dick Dever, Bismarck, ND Legislator; Representative Merle Boucher, Rolette, ND Legislator, Mark LoMurray, Suicide Prevention Consultant; Kathy Ziegelmann, MHAND board member, Jess Hegland, ND Human Rights Coalition and Tony Mandan, MHAND Board Member and Three Affiliated Tribes Elder and Tribal Member, Mike Rosmann, Executive Director, AgriWellness, Inc. Susan Helgeland, BHI Project Director and Kate Gaston, Mental Health America.

MHAND looks forward to sharing the documentary in DVD form to all ND elected officials, ND State Legislators, human service leaders and policy makers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I will be happy to answer any questions.