



October 11, 2021

Senate Majority Leader Shirkey & Members of the Senate Government Operations Committee,

We are writing to express opposition and concern to SB 597 – 598, the recent legislative proposal that would dramatically change the public mental system in Michigan. These bills would privatize the system and threaten to eliminate key components of care at the local community level.

Thousands of families across the State of Michigan depend on the public mental health system for affordable, accessible care. The changes being suggested at the legislative level do very little to improve care and access for people with a mental illness or addiction. The proposal focuses solely on the administrative / managed care level, not the direct service level, and the suggested changes could in fact hurt individuals receiving the care they need at a time when so many across our state are struggling, vulnerable and in need of support.

Our organizations want to express our support for Michigan's public mental health system and its strong local collaboration and problem-solving approach. Local law enforcement, judiciary, and prosecutors across Michigan have been in partnership with the Community Mental Health centers (CMHSPs and PIHPs) in their communities for years. Those partnerships include:

- CIT and other crisis response training for law enforcement personnel
- Wide range of jail diversion efforts (along the full intercept continuum from first encounter with law enforcement through re-entry into the community after incarceration)
- In-jail mental health and substance use disorder treatment
- Crisis response partnerships in which local law enforcement and CMHs work together to address mental health crises
- Mental health and substance use disorder/recovery courts

Community stakeholders have come together to form partnerships to promote care in the community and divert persons with serious mental illness from the criminal justice system. The civil justice system is being modified to provide for court-ordered outpatient treatment to help persons with serious mental illness recover. Commonly known as Assisted Outpatient Treatment or AOT, this system of care reduces homelessness, criminal justice involvement and hospitalization while promoting recovery.

Because the consequences of untreated mental illness have consequences across the criminal and civil justice system as well as education and child protection, managing the problem requires community partnerships and the most important partner is the system that delivers mental health care. **Law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, child protection services, hospitals, emergency rooms, crisis**

centers and healthcare providers and others have to come together to implement the sequential intercept model. The private sector can be a partner in this endeavor. It cannot be the owner. This would destroy the partnerships that the public sector has created to provide a system of community treatment.

Court-ordered outpatient treatment can be the community-based system of care promised by the supporters of closing mental hospitals. Currently, courts can order the public community mental health system to provide that care. Courts have no authority to order the private sector to provide that care or pay for that care. While, the private sector can be an important partner in providing care in the community control of the system of payment is critical to assuring that that care will actually occur.

The benefits of these community partnerships are just now being realized. Reforms to the Mental Health Code over the last four years have opened the door to an improved system of community treatment. We are finally, after nearly 50 years, seeing the emergence of a system of community care. We urge policy makers to give the system a chance to grow by encouraging additional collaboration to focus on integrating care at the level of the person being served, increasing access to the system, and focusing on prevention and diversion. Now is not the time to make drastic, unproven changes to the system.

Sincerely,



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CC; Governor Whitmer & the Michigan Senate