

October 25, 2019

Representative Mary Whiteford
House of Representatives
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

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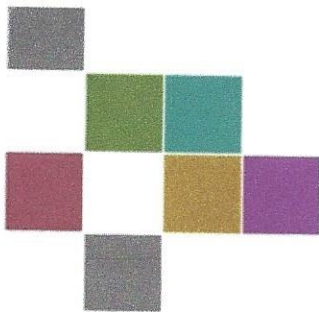
Dear Representative Whiteford and Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services:

I am contacting you to advocate for direct care staff working in the community mental health system throughout Michigan. I am the CEO of a non-profit organization in Kalamazoo employing about 410 staff. Roughly 370 of these staff are categorized as direct care workers. We are currently at least 60 staff short of being fully staffed and in today's employment market we cannot recruit the number of staff we need or the quality of staff we need.

You should all know that all CMH providers who employ direct care staff cannot recruit or retain staff to meet the needs of the people for whom we are responsible. The consumers in the mental health system are sometimes getting no services or getting less than they need. Staff burn out because they have to work so many hours as a result of being short staffed. When they get burned out they quit, creating a vicious cycle of crisis staffing. In November 2017 we terminated services to 31 consumers of mental health services only because we did not have enough staff to continue providing services.

This population of vulnerable Michigan citizens needs a workforce that can meet their complex disabilities. Many live in crisis and their entire families are therefore also in crisis. The impact on families is sometimes tragic.





The direct care workforce represents the backbone of the mental health system. These are the staff responsible for caring for those with the most severe disabilities in our system. They provide intimate physical care, they literally deal with life and death decisions, they deal with highly aggressive individuals who cannot express themselves in other ways - and they live in poverty. In a few instances our current staff are even homeless.

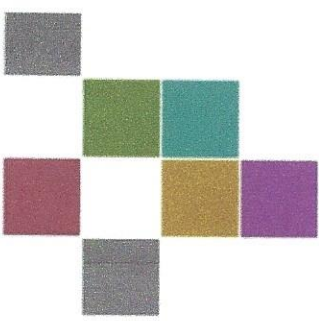
Providers cannot fully care for those for whom we are currently responsible and we do not have the capacity to respond to the needs of the older children coming into the mental health system. You should already be aware that hundreds of people live in State operated institutions only because there is no provider structure to support them in the community. Children and adults are living for months in hospital emergency rooms because there is no community infrastructure to support them. This is a direct result of Michigan knowingly not funding our community system of care.

We, the State of Michigan, need to invest in these staff if people are to have a good quality of life. The work is complex and detailed. Providers need to – at least - be in a competitive position with McDonald's, Costco, Target and others. We also need a strong benefits package if we want staff to stay in this workforce.

The Section 1009 Report, developed at the directive of our State Legislature in the FY 2015-16 State Budget and designed to create a set of recommendations regarding the direct care workforce shortage, calls for a starting wage of \$2.00 per hour above the minimum wage – or \$11.65 in 2020.

In the budget for the current fiscal year the Legislature has allocated no funding for direct care staff. The Legislature needs to fund these positions fully if you care about consumers receiving adequate care. Currently services are being terminated and others are receiving their services from an unreliable workforce. Only the State of Michigan has the resources to respond to this crisis.





I ask that the State of Michigan make this an ongoing funding priority so the users of the community mental health system can receive the care they deserve from a quality workforce. In order to assist with this please fully fund a \$0.50 per hour wage increase for this population of staff. This represents only a partial solution and the State needs a multi-year plan of implementation in order to create the necessary workforce.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue and your strong interest in the quality of life for people supported by Michigan's mental health system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Schrum". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Scott Schrum
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Representative Brandt Iden
Representative Matt Hall
Representative Beth Griffin

