



Andy Schor, Mayor

Lansing Police Department

120 West Michigan Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933
Phone: (517) 898-6344
Fax: (517) 377-0035



Daryl Green, Chief

March 2, 2021

The Honorable Representative Mary Whiteford, Chair
Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee

Inpatient Psychiatric Treatment for Adolescents/Children

It is encouraging that the HHS Appropriations Subcommittee is seeking information regarding psychiatric treatment of juveniles.

Serving as the Lansing Police Department Social Worker, I see the problems that cascade from the severe underfunding of psychiatric beds for both children and adults.

Officers are called multiple times daily to respond to incidents that occur due to the effects of severe mental illness. When problems surface in early childhood, they do not improve without adequate treatment.

I have responded to families who have children suffering from severe mental illness, who are sometimes suicidal, sometimes violent. We have had officers assaulted by children as young as 6 years old. Officers have put themselves in harm's way to protect children who cannot control their behavior and take actions that endanger themselves and others. I have been called to assist officers on multiple occasions who were asked to take a very young child because the parent could not control the child, nor could they obtain any kind of helpful treatment.

There is a troubling increase of severely mentally ill children under 10 years of age. More and more children are being given psychotropic medication at very young ages. Many, if not most, are being medicated by pediatricians and not psychiatrists. I spoke with a parent whose child was first medicated at age 2 years, 6 months for a severe diagnosis. I have met parents that do whatever they need to do to help their children, but they need more help from our mental health infrastructure.

There is something drastically wrong with this picture, and while more inpatient psychiatric beds won't fix everything, it might just change everything. With more beds there would be more stable assessment over time, a more structured environment for the children, possibly less medication, and an opportunity for parents to learn the best means to set limits.

Children don't stay children, and their problems go into adulthood with them. Without exception, every single violent offender with whom I have been able to work suffers from long standing severe mental illness. Most severely mentally ill citizens are not violent, in fact, most are preyed upon and need protection. Nonetheless, all of the violent offenders with whom I have worked suffer from mental illness. Had this specific population received adequate treatment at much younger ages, we may have had much different outcomes. To be clear, I am talking

“Capital City’s Finest”

about violence that has caused injury and death. A 10 year old who bites an officer and will not release him or her, and is left without adequate treatment and care, will most likely only become more vulnerable and therefore more dangerous.

It is not uncommon for people suffering from a psychotic episode to be hospitalized for a week or less, only to be released inadequately medicated and underserved. No one is adequately medicated in 7 days. No one.

I watch officers struggle to assist this population every single day. When those citizens are agitated, delusional, and paranoid, no matter the age, they need a more effective response than being put into the criminal justice system. All of the Lansing Police Department knows this, which is why they have embedded a social worker.

As the Lansing Police Department Social Worker, I am telling you that no one sees the desperation that the police see every day on patrol. Please understand, this is a desperate situation. Having a licensed social worker does not provide everything that is needed. The mentally ill need treatment beds. Children need to be adequately assessed in placement that exceeds what is available now.

Thank you for taking this testimony that I offer on behalf of the citizens of Lansing who need more help. It is an honor to serve them.

I would be happy to help this effort in any way possible. My email is jane.bidwell@lansingmi.gov. My work cell is: 517-898-6344.

Sincerely,

Jan Bidwell, LMSW
Lansing Police Department Social Worker