

January 10, 2008

Dear fellow commissioners,

Recently, I've been thinking a lot about the future of our commission, and I found myself reflecting back to the commission's first retreat. At that retreat, in August 2005, the members identified twelve key areas in which to focus its work:

1. Continuum of true care
2. Cultural competency
3. Being consumer- and family-driven
4. Homelessness
5. Supportive housing and reduction of institutional care
6. Decriminalization of mental illness
7. Transformation of the mental health workforce
8. Employment of clients and family, including employment in the mental health field
9. Children, especially keeping children out of the system, and education of children and parents as part of stigma reduction
10. Creating a support network of systems to provide a path to independence
11. Stigma reduction
12. Coordination at all levels of California government; supporting other states and the nation to adopt programs similar to the MHSA

In addition, the commission selected criteria for prioritizing its work:

- Financial “bang for the buck,” feasibility, and measurability
- Potential for transformation
- Short-term impactfulness (speed, visibility, and effectiveness)
- “Sore points” and “score points” with the public
- Impact on the “common” family and people of all ages
- Potential for mainstreaming clients
- Support of statutory guidance
- Broad collaboration
- Being consumer- and family-driven
- Cultural competency

With our recently increased staff resources, we now have the ability to begin implementing these guidelines and goals. Some of the things we need to do in the immediate future are: secure legal counsel; adopt rules of procedure; update our work plan; and decide how we're going to focus, prioritize, and measure the effects of our work. I also think it's important that we create a line-item budget, which would allow us to establish true independence as an oversight and accountability commission.

Furthermore, it's not just what we do, but how we do it. We need to lead by example. We need to be client- and family-driven as well as culturally competent. And we need to ensure that our staff and leadership reflect the changes we want to see in our mental

health system. In addition, I think it's vitally important that we preserve the integrity of the MHSA by opposing all supplantation of its funds in any form, and I will do everything I can to ensure that the money with which the taxpayers entrusted us is used for its intended purposes.

I am looking forward to the coming year because I believe we are poised to move into a new and exciting time for this commission. With much of the review, comment, and budget approval process operationalized, we can now turn our attention to the big picture.

We have important questions to answer: What do oversight and accountability really mean? What does it mean to be inclusive and transparent? And what does it mean to be client- and family-driven, or culturally competent?

One of the things I value most about this commission is the diversity of skills and strengths that we all bring to the table; I look forward to utilizing them collaboratively to make a real difference in the lives of unserved and underserved individuals living with mental illness and those who love them.

Sincerely,

Linford