

# *Andrew L. Poat*

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January 7, 2008

To: Members of the Mental Health Oversight & Accountability Commission  
Distribution to all interested parties through Commission public notice

Dear Fellow Commissioners:

First, may I extend my best wishes for a happy, healthy and successful 2008.

As members of the Commission, we all share one common measure of success in the new year: fully implementing the Mental Health Services Act. Working together, we can ensure both the delivery of more services to more people, and, larger changes in the client support network. At our January meeting, three important decisions will be adopted that will frame our ability to achieve these goals:

1. Act on a recommended candidate to fill the position of Executive Officer
2. Adopt a 2008 work plan and meeting schedule
3. Commission leadership for the year ahead

I write to introduce some goals and ideas on these subjects. I extend them in writing so as to permit full transparency with all interested parties – and with the expectation that ideas better than my own will likely be sparked by dialogue. These proposals and observations are made with a tremendous appreciation for the considerable successes and lessons learned from the Commission's first years of operation – and hopeful that a motive continuous improvement is clear to all.

## **Hiring a new Executive Officer**

By January, the recommendation of a working group of Commissioners will be available. I look forward to a thorough presentation on that subject. Organizing a commission of 16 people is a challenge of the highest order – I believe we will enhance the likelihood of success for whoever is chosen for the Executive Officer role by providing clear and relevant guidance as a group. Once a candidate is adopted, I hope the Commission will turn its sights to a fairly specific work plan and set of expectations for the Executive Officer in the year ahead, as well as a strategy to regularly track progress and performance. Independent of the candidate recommended, we owe that individual the clarity of specific work objectives and expectations – and the Commission owes itself the opportunity to discuss and prioritize its hopes and expectations.

## **Suggested items:**

- Adopt a strategy at January meeting to develop a 2008 performance evaluation plan for the new officer

## 2008 Work Plan & Meeting Schedule

One sentiment I have heard from a wide variety of commissioners and interested parties is that our public meetings offer two broad areas for improvement:

- Work plans need to be better organized between the MHSA's principle implementation parties so that the Commission can perform its functions in a well informed and timely fashion.
- MHSA meeting procedures need to better account for the information gathering needs of Commissioners – and to provide a better means for interested parties to participate

In order to accomplish these objectives, I propose the following:

- (1) Request Commission staff to prepare a list for the January meeting of the action items the Commission must adopt during calendar year 2008 to achieve the following:
  - a. Operationalize all MHSA programs by December, 2008
  - b. Properly dispense “oversight & Accountability” functions and reporting roles
  - c. Prepare for cycle 2 of the act: program integration
  - d. Identify opportunities to leverage MHSA funds for broad refocusing of Mental health programs around client centered, social service support programs.
- (2) Build a 2008 Commission meeting schedule by assigning specific issues and proposals to specific meeting dates – thereby giving commissioners and interested parties long term notice of dates by which issue briefs, recommendations and comments are required. Clearly, issues will slip from time to time. The schedule, however, will provide a roadmap to all those who wish to make informed decisions and participate in commission proceedings.
- (3) Adopting a two stage process for adoption of key commission decisions. I remain committed to conducting the work of the commission in open session – and believe that we can improve our current format by adopting a less formal “workshop” structure for at least some commission deliberations. A first hearing on a subject might be a new, less formal “workshop” format in which all commissioners, panels of consumers, family members, service providers, county administrators and others would be invited to testify and respond to commission questions, with a second more formal “adoption” hearing at which any residual issues or questions are answered prior to Commission adoption.
- (4) Ensure that a lead commissioner is assigned to all major policy decisions that appear before the commission.
- (5) Distribute reports and power point presentations on all commission meeting items by the Friday PRIOR to the Commission meeting
- (6) Agreement at the CLOSE of one Commission meeting as to the action items that will be taken up at the NEXT commission meeting – again providing full transparency and advance notice to commissioners, staff and members of the public as to how best to prepare for the next meeting.

Suggested Action Items:

- Notice for discussion and adoption at January commission meeting a proposed 2008 work plan and commission meeting schedule – supported by staff report on timeline for adoption of 2008 implementation requirements
- Staff proposal on possible meeting format changes to permit workshops and decision meetings

**2008 Commission leadership**

The work of our inaugural chair, Senator Darrell Steinberg, leaves the Commission in the position of a national leader – implementing a first of its kind program. Our gratitude to Darrell is deep and heartfelt. Moving forward, I believe our best strategy to achieve Darrell’s many contributions is to leverage the considerable skills of all 16 commissioners. I don’t pretend to have a magic answer to this question – but will hope to have the opportunity to discuss with each of you over the coming weeks your hopes, ideas and suggestions on how a strong leadership team can be constructed – with the goal of adopting a strategy at our January meeting.

2008 will be the third year of the Commission’s life – and a deadline, in my mind at least, for making all programs of the MHSa operational. Working together, we can achieve these goals. I look forward to working at your side to do so.

With best personal regards,

Andrew Poat