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Re: Support for Linford Gayle as Chair of the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC.)

Dear Mental Health Commissioner:

I write as a private resident of California and a person who identifies as a mental health consumer who also has acquired insight, knowledge, and experience of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) through my advocacy roles within the mental health community. As Executive Director of the California Network of Mental Health Clients (CNMHC) from 1997 until July 2007, I was very involved with the MHSA on a state level, from its inception as an idea to its passage as Proposition 63 to its implementation. And, currently, I am involved in the MHSA in Alameda County as it plays out on the ground at a local level. It is from these perspectives that I write.

I strongly support the selection of Linford Gayle as Chair of the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC.) I support Linford for the following reasons:

1. Linford, a consumer of mental health services, as Chair of the MHSOAC would lead by example, truly modeling the principles which ground the MHSA – consumer and family driven and cultural diversity.
2. Linford has demonstrated his effectiveness as a leader and even handed facilitator in his role as Vice Chair since the inception of the MHSOAC and more recently as acting Chair after Senator Steinberg resigned from that position.
3. Linford has made significant changes in the operations of the MHSOAC meetings. His persuasion has led to greater prioritization of public comment, affording clients, family members and other stakeholders a better opportunity to participate in the deliberations of the MHSOAC. Linford also has taken steps to ensure more time is set aside for the CNMHC and its sister state level stakeholder organizations to formally comment on action items. All of this is in line with promoting transparency and inclusiveness within the MHSOAC, key principles of the MHSA.
4. Throughout his tenure as Vice Chair and Chair, Linford has consistently encouraged the Commission to prioritize the concerns of communities of color and other marginalized voices and has fought for their voices to be heard. In fact, it is the unserved and underserved that the MHSA prioritizes.

5. Finally, I am impressed that in Linford's letter to the Commission ( January 10, 2008), he looks back to the values and principles of the MHSA to shape the future of the MHSOAC. I think that the Chair of the MHSOAC first and foremost must promote the basic values of the MHSA – no less than the transformation of the mental health system. The business of the MHSOAC is very important; however, the inherent values of the MHSA should be paramount and drive all the workings of the Commission.

Thank you for considering my opinion.

Sally Zinman  
Consumer Relations Specialist