

ARLINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD
Mental Health Committee Meeting
February 28, 2024

Committee Members Present: Steve Gallagher, Dori Mitchell, Judy Deane, John Mitchell, Anne Hermann, Rita Tiwari
Binta Niambi Brown (joined virtually)

Committee Members Absent: Steven Taphorn

Guests Present: n/a

Others Present: n/a

Staff Present: Carol Layer, Asta Lynch, Suzanne Somerville, Deborah Warren, Anabel Majano

Call to Order: 5:00 pm

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

Welcome

Mr. Gallagher opened the meeting by acknowledging the various topics to be discussed.

Approval of Minutes

This was the first official committee meeting since September 2023. The committee agreed to attach the notes from past informational meetings to the minutes for this meeting for future reference.

Restoration to Competency Process

Ms. Deane expressed concern about the concept of restoration of competency, especially for individuals in detention centers.

Ms. Somerville provided an in-depth explanation of the state's crisis around restoration of competency.

- **Plans for improving the system:** Ms. Somerville outlined the plans for building capacity within the jail-based team for the educational portion of restoration of competency. She also mentioned the efforts to stabilize people as quickly as possible, especially for those in jail with misdemeanor charges. She mentioned that medication becomes a big issue if a person is waiting to go to the state hospital, the facility can do medications over objection, but it is an extremely challenging process.
- **State Hospitals and Forensic Admissions:** Ms. Somerville mentioned that the state hospitals are facing a crisis largely due to forensic admissions, mostly related to restoration of competency. She provided statistics on the number of individuals at

various state hospitals and the process for transferring and evaluating individuals for competency to stand trial.

- **Diversion Efforts:** She highlighted the work being done on diversion, including the jail-based team's proactive identification of individuals and coordination with lawyers to present plans in court for treatment rather than sending them to state hospitals. She also mentioned the law allowing misdemeanor charges to be null-processed and individuals sent to the hospital if they meet the criteria for detainment.

The committee discussed the challenges faced by non-Arlington residents and the services that they are eligible to receive. Ms. Somerville explained the role of forensic discharge planners and the efforts to connect all eligible individuals to behavioral health resources upon release from jail. She mentioned that 70% of inmates are non-residents, only 30% are Arlington residents.

Ms. Somerville shared information about the program set up through Judge Fiori's docket to address individuals struggling with completing probation. She also discussed the impact of Medicaid expansion on substance use treatment, noting the ease of getting individuals connected to Medicaid and the reduction in costs for the county.

Behavioral Healthcare Division Director's Report

The County Manager's proposed budget was presented last Saturday. Ms. Layer stated that all departments had to submit reduction proposals to the county manager. No cuts from the behavioral healthcare division were in the proposed budget.

Open Discussion

Mr. Gallagher mentioned that the committee chairs get a chance to speak for two minutes or so to each of the County board members. There was a discussion on what to focus on as well as expressing gratitude for preserving the existing behavioral health services in the Department of Human Services and recognizing the need that continues to grow in behavioral healthcare.

The committee expressed interest in exploring public-private partnerships and other innovative approaches to enhance mental health services.

The need for a vision for Arlington in 2050 was also discussed, with the committee planning to provide input on what mental health services should look like in the future.

Ms. Brown and other committee members discussed the importance of engaging younger populations in the committee's work and the potential use of social media platforms like TikTok to reach out to younger demographics.

Mr. Gallagher addressed the need for a quorum at meetings and the possibility of adjusting meeting times to accommodate attendees. The committee also discussed the need for a

systematic approach to addressing mental health issues in Arlington and the potential for future meetings to focus on specific subjects to attract interested individuals.

Mr. Gallagher asked for suggestions on topics, he mentioned the jail tour, some more suggestions for the young adults' program, public-private partnerships not just Pathways or the other organization or the group on-site, multicultural resources, and the court system. Ms. Layer reminded the committee about what was talked about last meeting in holding a meeting in the spring at the group home.

A member of the committee gave a quick report on Pathways mentioning that there is a family meeting every month. She mentioned that the homes are doing well. She mentioned they have two minivans, one for each house. With those minivans, they can start helping with doctors' appointments and excursions and so on. There were concerns raised about medication errors and emergency services protocols in Pathways homes. Ms. Layer reported she will follow up separately on some of those concerns.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on various administrative matters and suggestions.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.