



**FLORIDA
COUNCIL**

For Community Mental Health

November 9, 2010

Dear Senator:

If you ran for election or re-election this year, I want to congratulate you on winning this very important election. If you were not up for election but are returning to the Legislature, we look forward to working with you as well. These are very difficult times and I know all of you are up to the challenge.

As I am sure you are aware, in preparation for another tight budget year, state agencies – including the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) – are being required to submit legislative budget proposals that will reduce their general revenue funding by 15 percent for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

For DCF, the 15 percent reduction equates to approximately \$236.3 million. The most significant cut proposed by DCF is reducing its adult community mental health budget by almost \$146 million, or more than 60 percent of the total DCF budget cuts. If approved, Florida's Baker Act services would be eliminated, reducing funding by \$62.3 million, along with the termination of the indigent drug program with funding reduced by \$6.8 million. Another severe cut faces community mental health services – a proposed reduction of \$76.5 million, more than 44 percent of the program's total budget. On the other hand, other programs, including the forensic and civil commitment programs – the most expensive per capita mental health programs – have been largely spared. These cuts will have a devastating effect on Florida's communities and significantly reduce the ability to help Floridians in crisis. Without funding for Baker Act services, 1,598 crisis care beds – 1,307 adult beds and 291 children's beds – serving persons that are a danger to themselves or others and without insurance or other ability to pay, would be lost. It would also force the closure of 36 crisis stabilization units and the elimination of 14 mobile crisis intervention teams.

Failure to provide funding for these services could have a devastating ripple effect, compounding our state's economic woes, endangering our most vulnerable citizens and causing great harm to our families and communities. Research has shown that prevention and treatment services for mental health and substance abuse increase savings in medical care, welfare payments and prison costs. They also reduce homelessness, child abuse and neglect, crime, unemployment, poverty and poor education. We simply cannot afford to lose these cost-effective alternatives. The proposed DCF cuts would force the nearly 12,000 individuals that receive voluntary or court-ordered community mental health treatment annually to be sent to hospital inpatient beds at four times the cost. This proposal does not account for the inevitable increase in state hospital and forensic commitments. DCF currently operates only 1,518 civil beds with a wait time of approximately 53 days. Florida already ranks 49th in the country in per-capita spending for mental health services and 35th in the nation in per-capita spending for substance abuse treatment. DCF's proposal would essentially eliminate adult community mental health services entirely. Any savings resulting from these cuts would be dwarfed by the increased costs for health care, law enforcement, corrections and child welfare caused by the loss of front-end, preventive and cost-effective community mental health care.

If funded, behavioral health treatment will work, and an investment in community based care will allow the State to avoid spending scarce dollars on deep-end care.

If you would like, please reach out to me at any time. Again, thank you for your public service and I look forward to working with you in protecting Florida's most vulnerable populations - persons with mental illness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Sharpe".

Bob Sharpe
CEO and President