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STATE OF VERMONT
MENTAL HEALTH OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

October 7, 2014

Senator Virginia Lyons
Health Care Oversight Committee
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Senator Lyons,

I am writing on behalf of the Mental Health Oversight Committee (MHOC) concerning the future oversight of the mental health system while the General Assembly is adjourned. As you know, 2014 Acts and Resolves No. 179, Sec. E.306.6 requires the Health Care Oversight Committee (HCOC) to consult with MHOC as to whether “a single oversight structure is needed to be the successor to the Health Care Oversight Committee and the Mental Health Oversight Committee.”

With that purpose in mind, MHOC met several times since the General Assembly adjourned in order to examine and evaluate the progress and stability of Vermont’s restructured mental health system. At our most recent meeting, members specifically discussed whether or not, in addition to oversight by relevant standing committees during the legislative session, there is need for targeted oversight of Vermont’s mental health system. The consensus was yes. There continues to be a need for formal legislative oversight focused solely on the mental health system when the General Assembly is not in session.

Based on the reports and testimony heard, MHOC determined that our State’s adult mental health system has not emerged from the crisis that began with Tropical Storm Irene in August 2011. While significant progress has been made since that time, Committee members understand that there is still a great deal of work that must be accomplished to stabilize the system. MHOC remains concerned that not all of the individual components of the redesigned system as outlined in Act 79, which are meant to replace and improve the services provided at the Vermont State Hospital, have been fully developed. The current quality, functioning, and integration of the various components necessary to create a comprehensive system are also of great concern to MHOC.

Regrettably, the significant instability of the current mental health system has lead MHOC to the conclusion that focused oversight of this system cannot be done at this time within the context of overseeing health care and its reform, which is our ultimate goal. Therefore,

MHOC recommends that the General Assembly enact a time-limited and focused joint oversight committee whose sole charge is to monitor the ongoing development and implementation of Act 79. Membership should be drawn from relevant policy committees without being so prescriptive that it limits flexibility based on member interest and expertise.

If you need any further information or elaboration of our recommendation, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Representative Ann Pugh, Chair
Mental Health Oversight Committee