

The Honorable Tim Ashe, Senate President Pro Tempore  
The Honorable Claire Ayer, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare  
The Honorable Peg Flory, Chair, Senate Committee on Institutions  
The Honorable Jane Kitchel, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Vermont State House  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

March 26, 2018

Dear Senators Ashe, Ayer, Flory and Kitchel,

We are writing to you regarding the current discussion in the Vermont Legislature regarding mental health and the challenges we face due to a lack of inpatient psychiatry capacity in our state.

We are a committee with a stake in this issue and how it is solved, and we are writing to offer to testify before your respective Senate committees in the coming weeks as you debate legislation around funding the development of additional bed capacity, including beds for patients who enter the mental health system through the criminal justice system.

For background, our Community Collaborative Committee was formed in June of 2017, when a broad group of town managers and law enforcement personnel from across Chittenden County came together to meet with representatives from the Howard Center and University of Vermont Medical Center to share the challenges we face in addressing the increasing number of mental health issues facing our communities. "The mental health system is broken," is how one town manager summed up the situation.

Out of that meeting, our committee was formed to drill down into these challenges and begin a constructive conversation around possible solutions. We met twice a month through 2017, and also held a larger group meeting for town managers and police chiefs to share concerns with Secretary of Human Services Al Gobeille. In November of 2017, we met with Department of Mental Health Commissioner Melissa Bailey to share a short list of recommendations and priorities. At the top of the list:

- *Create an alternative care setting for patients involved in the criminal justice system:* Find an alternative place for the patients engaged with the criminal justice system, who account for approximately half of the inpatient capacity at the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital.
- *Create additional inpatient psychiatric beds:* Begin planning for the creation of additional inpatient psychiatric beds.
- *Help fund implementation of the Chittenden County Community Outreach Program:* Howard Center personnel, in collaboration with town and city managers and police chiefs from six Chittenden County towns -- South Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Shelburne, Williston and Winooski – have come together to develop a countywide version of the Street Outreach program that has been in place on Church Street in Burlington for years.

We are pleased to report that the Chittenden County Community Outreach Program has acquired the necessary state funding (from the Department of Mental Health) and local funding support (from the six participating towns) to launch by April 1<sup>st</sup>, just seven months after the idea was first discussed back in

August of 2017. We hope the legislature provides the program with the ongoing support it will need to continue its important work.

We respectfully request that your respective committees hear from us, and we be given an opportunity to share our knowledge and perspectives with you.

Sincerely,

Bob Bick, CEO, Howard Center  
Kevin Dorn, South Burlington City Manager  
Ann Janda, Director of Administration, Town of Shelburne  
Jennifer Morrison, Colchester Chief of Police  
Miro Weinberger, Mayor of Burlington  
Eileen Whalen, President and COO, UVM Medical Center  
Trevor Whipple, South Burlington Chief of Police