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MENTAL HEALTH LAW PROJECT

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TO: Senate Health and Welfare Committee
FROM: John J. McCullough III, Project Director
DATE: January 17, 2017
RE: MHLP Legislative Priorities

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our legislative priorities with you this morning.

The Mental Health Law Project represents Vermonters in involuntary mental health proceedings throughout Vermont. In calendar year 2016 we handled 1495 cases, of which over one thousand involved court proceedings. The MHLP is committed to defend the rights of Vermonters in the involuntary mental health system by providing the highest quality legal representation available. In order to further these rights, we have arrived at the following legislative priorities for the coming biennium.

Work toward a Mental Health System that Does Not Require Coercion or the Use of Involuntary Medication

1. Defend the procedural and substantive rights that Vermonters now have in involuntary mental health proceedings and in the involuntary mental health system.
2. Preserve and expand protections relating to emergency involuntary procedures to all hospitals and other settings in which people diagnosed with mental illness are confined.
3. Work with and support other advocates to remove impediments to discharges from psychiatric hospitals brought about by the Vermont Supreme Court decision in *Kuligoski v. Brattleboro Retreat, et al.*
4. Support the recommendations of the Commission on Offenders with Mental Illness to improve mental health treatment and reduce inappropriate detention in the Corrections system.
5. Work with and support other advocates to oppose the use of emergency departments for involuntary detention
6. Support efforts to reduce hospitalization by expanding community residential and treatment resources, particularly those that emphasize voluntary, client-directed approaches.