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**EMBEDDING MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS WITHIN LAW ENFORCEMENT
AGENCIES AND SCHOOLS:
NECESSARY TO BLEND THE DEMARCATION LINES BETWEEN THE
CORRECTIONS SYSTEM AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND
DEPLOY THE MOST APPROPRIATE, EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN
THE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS AFFLICTED WITH MENTAL
HEALTH AND/OR ADDICTION DISORDERS**

Dear Chairman William Lippert, and Members of the House Committee on Health Care:

My name is Tomasz Jankowski, president and CEO of Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS). I wish to thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony on such important and consequential topic. I also thank you for your leadership in exploring new and innovative methods of delivering mental health and addiction services and for your interest in making strategic financial investments in that regard.

Celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, NKHS is one of the 10 Designated Agencies that provide comprehensive range of mental health, addiction, and intellectual and developmental disability services. NKHS is the third largest employer in the Northeast Kingdom, employs over 500 staff, serves about 4,000 consumers, annually, and covers a geographic area of about 2,100 square miles across 48 towns of the Orleans, Essex, and Caledonia Counties, while supporting two critical access hospitals, the North Country Hospital and Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital. The 2,100 square miles represent the largest geographic area coverage of any of the designated agencies. According to the 2010 Census, on average, 31 people reside in the Northeast Kingdom, per square mile. NKHS presently serves 6.2% of that population.

Approximately 10 years ago, NKHS pioneered an Enhanced Mental Health Embedment program, the first such program in Vermont. One of the unique features of this service has been the case management component designed to provide a “warm hand-off” of clients between NKHS and the police. Under its auspices, both parties work together to respond to emergency calls, follow up with clients, and schedule subsequent appointments for mental health and addiction services. It

was created to serve our Newport and St. Johnsbury communities, and, although the Newport program is currently not fully staffed, the St. Johnsbury program is still in full force. Within this enhanced program, emergency staff do not respond solely to the state police. They may be dispatched anywhere: hospitals, health care centers, schools, community streets, and courts. Historically, this service has been funded by Act 79 through DMH and provided in addition to the regular emergency services offered by NKHS. The staff reports to NKHS' emergency services manager and works out of, both, NKHS Derby and St. Johnsbury offices.

For many years, NKHS has been also instrumental in collaborating and implementing the Team 2 training program. This program has proven invaluable in developing the groundwork for clients' transition, improving community outreach and street presence, and blending the intersection between law enforcement and community services. It has been also instrumental in pairing up the law enforcement with mental health workers, providing bilateral training and education on matters such as scenario-based de-escalation techniques, or the understanding of the law from the mental health and law enforcement perspectives. NKHS continues its commitment and engagement to building upon this very important initiative.

Building upon many years of experience and in close consultation with the State Attorneys and the law enforcement leadership of the Orleans, Essex, and Caledonia counties, NKHS has developed and internally funded two full-time embedded mental health clinical positions, which are different from the Enhanced program. One position has been embedded in July with the Newport City Police and shall be shared with the Orleans County Sheriff, and the Derby State Police Barracks. The second embedded mental health clinician position shall reside within the St. Johnsbury State Police Barracks and shall be shared with the Caledonia Sherriff, and the St. Johnsbury Police. While employed by NKHS, the embedded mental health clinician shall be stationed at the police department/barracks five days per week, train with the PD/VSP, be supervised by the law enforcement leadership relative to the day-to-day operations, and by their NKHS supervisor for clinical competency training. Those individuals shall respond to only police-related calls, ride along with them, and patrol the streets, if not responding to calls. The staff shall not be pulled-away to respond to NKHS calls, at any time. They shall maintain communication with the Emergency Services staff to discuss clients that require follow-up or check-in calls. Data shall be collected to ascertain the efficacy of this program and shall be shared between the law enforcement and NKHS for quality assurance and improvement. NKHS has already received multiple applications for these positions and we expect to fill those over the next few weeks.

The NKHS embedment program has been recently featured on the [Channel 5 News](#), in [VTDigger](#), and [several other media outlets](#). I have also recently spent two night shifts riding-along with the Newport Police and Vermont State Police officers across the tri-county region responding to calls addressing safety and security concerns. This experience offered me an enhanced perspective and appreciation from the front seat of a police cruiser for the mental health and social issues that must be addressed within our communities. Furthermore, in our team's multiple conversations with the law enforcement leadership, it became abundantly clear that such embedment program would serve as a necessary and invaluable community resource.

While this embedded program constitutes an important step in the right direction, its limited scale will unlikely deliver optimal solutions to this chronic problem. Sharing a single embedded mental

health worker among three law enforcement agencies shall, without a doubt, be challenging for the law enforcement agencies and NKHS, unless adequate funding had been secured to expend it. In the short-term, NKHS' plans to create a third embedded mental health worker with the Essex County/Canaan police. This county has been, historically, underserved and challenged by the lack of adequate resources. NKHS is fully committed to reversing this trend.

In the long-term, NKHS would like to triple the number of embedded mental health clinicians with the police across the three counties and, eventually, secure 24 hour per day coverage with each of the law enforcement agencies. As indicated by Commissioners Schirling and Squirrell in their September 3, testimony to the House Health Care Committee on this topic, the Howard Center has been able to develop a robust and successful embedded program with the financial support of the Department of Mental Health. I am confident in NKHS' ability to attain similarly high level of success if aided by adequate and sustainable state funding.

Embedded mental health clinicians frequently serve on the front lines as First Responders. They are often uniquely equipped to intervene and deescalate challenging cases. In one instance, a [distressed] female victim of domestic violence arrived at the Newport police station while her partner waited outside the building. A police officer, who initially engaged the victim in a conversation, stepped back within several minutes of the NKHS embedded mental health clinician arriving at the scene. Within the next several minutes the mental health clinician was able to deescalate a tense situation and interview the female in a private room. Such, amicable end-result may have not been accomplished by a uniformed officer. In another example, NKHS' Emergency on-call team, the Newport Police, and the embedded mental health clinician, working in tandem, were able to successfully facilitate an involuntary admission process of an individual admitted to the emergency department at the local hospital.

Several successful embedment models already exist in Burlington, St. Albans, and Springfield, Vermont. Our goal is to build upon those models by increasing the number of embedded mental health clinicians, not only with the law enforcement, but also within the schools. The increased state funding shall facilitate our success in decreasing activity in the court system, decreasing inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations, use of Emergency Departments at the critical access hospitals, decreasing suicide rate, incarceration rate, evictions, trauma, and truancy among school children. Any additional funds appropriated to this program by the departments of Mental Health and Public Safety shall be invested in embedding additional mental health clinicians, training, and education in each of the Northeast Kingdom counties.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, and please reach out to me with any questions, or should you require additional information.

Cordially,

Tomasz L. Jankowski
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Northeast Kingdom Human Services