

Testimony to:

11/3/19

**The Mental Health Trust Board
The Alaska Mental Health Board**

There are about 20 facilities that detain disabled psychiatric patients. When filing a complaint, patients do not have an impartial person helping them. And do not have an impartial body to bring their complaint to within the facility. The unnecessary damage to disabled psychiatric patients is at a high cost.

Each year approximately 10,000 Mental Health Trust beneficiaries enter a system that unnecessarily mistreats them. Physical injuries and trauma top the list; the number is into the thousands and the cost to the state is into the millions. The legislature, the Mental Health Trust and the Alaska Mental Health Board could do a lot to lower the numbers.

On October 21st, Superior Court Judge William Morse became the conscience for half a dozen state agencies and non-profits. “Civil detainees (psychiatric patients) are being subject to extraordinary conditions that amount to punishment.” Judge Morse in his ruling gave the state 45 days to produce a plan on how to reduce psychiatric patient mistreatment.

Creating psychiatric patient rights and quality of care on an emergency basis through the courts demonstrates a legislative failure. And the shortcomings of advocacy organizations tasked with protecting the disabled.

What the state does not know is hurting the disabled, as an example: The number and type of patient complaints during treatment or transportation and the number of injuries and “What is the number of patients that are exposed to institutional trauma and the type of trauma?”

The Mental Health Trust and legislators should produce statistics of patient mistreatment and needed improvements in the grievance law and then produce legislation that protects psychiatric patients.

Mental Health Advocates, Faith Myers, 3240 Penland Pkwy, Sp. 35
Anchorage, AK. 99508 907-929-0532

Reference information next page

Reference Information

Institutional Trauma: Up to 47% of acute care psychiatric patient during treatment or transportation will experience trauma that may cause or exacerbate PTSD. Psychiatric institutions and units in Alaska are not required by state standards to recognize and treat institutional trauma.

I spent a number of months locked in a psychiatric institution. And then had to spend countless hours and thousands of dollars for therapy due to institutional trauma. Two years ago, a woman testified to the House HSS Committee that her daughter was repeatedly re-traumatized in institutions.—Two documents go into detail on what constitutes institutional trauma, both on the physical and the mental side: Ann F. Jennings, PhD., author of “On being invisible in the mental health system,” profiled a psychiatric patient from age 12 to 32—cost of care—into the millions. There is also documentation of how the patient was repeatedly re-traumatized by institutional trauma. And “Trauma in the Psychiatric setting—An Empirical Report,” by Karen J. Cusack and others. There should be a state policy to recognize and treat institutional trauma as it happens.

Profile of a Bad grievance procedure law for the disabled:

AS47.30.847 lets psychiatric institutions write the patient grievance and appeal process, hire the patient advocate, and determine when the patient advocate will be available to patients—In 2008, the State Ombudsman’s Office in a report pointed out that Behavioral Health had not investigated a psychiatric patient’s complaint in five years—In 2017, 7 percent of API patients were injured.

State law AS47.30.840 lets psychiatric institutions and units with no state standards determine when patients can go outdoors, have visitors, etc. States with best practice set standards that promote recovery.

State law AS18.20.095 requires institutions to reduce trauma to patients by providing gender choice of staff for intimate care. And routine safety checks into patient bedrooms, bathrooms and showers must be done by same gender staff as the patient. No psychiatric institution including Alaska Psychiatric Institute likes this law and have never written a policy to implement the spirit of the law.

Reference information provided by Mental Health Advocate, Faith Myers, 929-0532