



The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is committed to being a leader in identifying issues faced by all people affected by mental illness, facilitating improvements in mental health services, giving consumers and families a strong voice, reducing stigma, and implementing recovery principles.

Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force Testimony Milwaukee County Mental Health Board Meeting

Delivered by Susan Gadacz – MHTF Steering Committee January 23, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Lutzow, and members of the Milwaukee County Mental Health Board (MCMHB) for this opportunity to comment on redesign of psychiatric crisis services and Behavioral Health Division Services.

The Mental Health Task Force strongly endorses the 2019 addition of a new position, the Criminal Justice Lead Administrative Coordinator. Kaelin Deprez is based at the Milwaukee County Jail. She works directly with individuals who have a mental illness and serves as a liaison with community providers and BHD, to support continuity of care and to ensure individuals are connected with supports when they return to the community. It's our understanding that this position was funded by grant funds. This liaison position is very much needed and we ask that the Mental Health Board prioritize this position in the budget when grant funds come to an end.

Another positive addition in 2019 was a new position to help connect consumers with employment supports and services. Beth Lohmann is the IPS Integrated Service Coordinator. The majority of people who live with a mental illness want to work. Studies indicate that approximately 2 out of every 3 people with mental illness are interested in competitive employment, but less than 15% are currently employed. This position is a smart investment and has the potential to increase the independence and support recovery for BHD clients. This is also a priority area for the Mental Health Task Force. Our February meeting will include a speaker from the Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to increase awareness of DVR services.

In regards to crisis redesign, the Mental Health Task Force is encouraged to see the following initiatives:

- We welcome the plan to establish additional Crisis Resource Centers, including the plan to open a CRC on the Northwest side where there is an urgent need for these services. We are also gratified that Wisconsin DHS state has agreed to expand coverage for CRC services for BadgerCare+ and to be part of the advocacy effort on this issue.
- The Mental Health Task Force supports collaborative partnerships with BHD and Community Health Centers including Milwaukee Health Services, Outreach Community Health Center, Progressive Community Health Center, and Sixteenth Street Community Health Center.

We also ask that the Crisis Redesign process address the need for coordinated resources to support interventions to avoid repeated criminal justice system involvement. That must include a dedicated resource for police and prosecutors to respond to problematic behavior outside of psych emergency and the jail. We recommend funding a drop off center with respite beds, as well as resources from housing, behavioral health, and benefits counselling.

As noted in previous testimony regarding crisis redesign, we once again ask that Milwaukee County address the urgent need for strong stakeholder involvement in the crisis redesign and transition process, including people who use crisis services, the continuum of service providers (mental health, AODA, housing, shelter system, etc), advocates and attorneys, law enforcement, and family members. This must include representation from diverse communities. In our January and September 2019 testimony, we shared the willingness of Mental Health Task Force members to serve on work groups and to partner with you on this important charge. We are concerned that to date, this has not occurred. The timeline for developing the new crisis system is short, and stakeholder involvement is a critical success factor. When will a workplan and timeline be shared? What is the status of including stakeholders in workgroups?

Lastly, as BHD begins its 2021 budget preparation, we reiterate some common themes shared at the May 2019 public testimony on the budget. Please listen to your providers, your stakeholders, and the individuals you serve. Please collaborate with us on your budget preparation; and, please make a significant investment in community based crisis services.

Redesign of a crisis services is an opportunity as well as a major challenge for our community. This requires a collaborative effort with people who receive services, advocates, and community providers. Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force members are ready and willing to be a resource, and to be at the table to ensure that new crisis system supports prevention on the front end, is easy to access and navigate, treats community members with respect and dignity, is committed and innovative in engaging consumers in voluntary treatment, and is trauma informed and culturally competent. We continue to be concerned about the lack of opportunities for community engagement.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and for your service on the Mental Health Board.