

# MINUTES

## Joint Fiscal Committee Meeting of April 25, 2006

Representative Martha Heath, Chair of the Joint Fiscal Committee, called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. in Room 10, State House.

Also present: Representatives Obuchowski, Perry, Severance and Westman  
Senators Bartlett, Cummings and Snelling

Others attending the meeting included Senator James Leddy and Representative Michael Fisher on behalf of the Joint Legislative Mental Health Oversight Committee, Joint Fiscal Office staff, Administration officials and staff, and representatives of advocacy groups.

### **VERMONT STATE HOSPITAL FUTURES PLAN:**

1. The sole purpose of the meeting was to consider and vote on a comprehensive implementation plan for replacement of services currently provided by the Vermont State Hospital (VSH). Section 141a. of Act No. 122 of 2004 required that the plan be presented to this Committee and the Joint Legislative Mental Health Oversight Committee (MHOC). The former group approved the plan on March 22, 2006 and on April 11 forwarded it to the Fiscal Committee.

In addition to the plan itself, the members received an April 25 memorandum from Representative Ann Pugh, Chair of the House Human Services Committee on the subject of the Division of Mental Health's request for an exemption from the need to obtain a Certificate of Need (CON) in order to build a new inpatient facility; a brief summary of the current program at VSH and of the continued planning process, together with a time line recapping decision points for the MHOC between the present time and September 2006; and a memorandum from Beth Tanzman, Futures Project Director, Vermont Department of Health, Division of Mental Health.

Secretary of Human Services Cynthia LaWare prefaced the presentation and discussion of the plan with general remarks about how critical the project is to the mental health community; the opportunity it provides for very significant system reforms in the delivery of mental health services; and the importance of affiliating a new inpatient facility with a teaching, tertiary care hospital (Fletcher Allen Health Care).

Ms. Tanzman then led the Committee through the highlights of the plan, including the major objectives and restructuring of inpatient care delivery into two levels. She stressed that the last objective of replacing current services at the State Hospital is not the same thing as replacing its staff.

Following her presentation, Committee members questioned Ms. Tanzman about various aspects of implementation of the plan and its oversight, covering such issues as costs associated with providing mental health support services at the community level, the past management of VSH, the Certificate of Need related to a new inpatient facility, the design and size of the structure; the status of current staff at VSH; the duration of the plan; and federal certification.

On the last subject, Ms. Tanzman observed that the staff probably is the most valuable resource in the State's delivery of mental health services.

The Chair expressed her dismay over the amount of money that has been spent, to no apparent avail, in the state's efforts to locate sites for sub-acute beds in local communities. In answer to her inquiry as to whether the situation has improved, Ms. Tanzman advised that the state has made good progress in locating a place in Williamstown that would serve as a residential care facility and that there have very positive, well-sequenced interactions with local officials in that town. She added that the state alternatively continues to seek a village setting for a facility.

Senator Leddy and Representative Fisher commented on the plan from their perspective as MHOC co-chairs. The latter stressed that that the MHOC regards the plan as a goal, that it is a work in progress with many aspects to be revisited.

The Senator made the point that while the discussion at this meeting has been narrowly focused on a particular subject, in actuality Vermont has a remarkable story in meeting the needs of its mentally ill citizens including developing strong community resources that provide quality infrastructure and services. He went on to say that in the matter of the State Hospital, there have been major mistakes, the collective responsibility for which rests on more than one Administration or Legislature or other decision-making body. Since the federal government decertified the State Hospital, remarkably little progress has been made in improving the quality of services to the mentally ill, and he believed that the plan represents not just an opportunity, but an obligation. Furthermore, he made the point that a partnership whereby those receiving services have a voice in those services and strengthening of connections with local communities need to be restored.

The discussion came to a close with a motion by Senator Snelling to approve the plan as presented. The motion was seconded by Senator Bartlett and approved on a voice vote, with no member registering a negative vote.

Prior to the vote, Representative Perry said he did not view what was presented as a plan, but rather as a concept, a statement of objectives. He said he was not ready to approve five years' funding given the financial information provided, and he hoped that approval of the plan did not carry such implications.

Chief Fiscal Officer Stephen Klein agreed with the need expressed by Representative Perry for ongoing review of the costs associated with implementation of the futures plan and suggested that approval might include that caveat. The Chair pointed out that the costs will be presented and reviewed each year as part of the legislative budget process. Representative Perry said he thought that annual appropriations requests to the Legislature should not be limited to the costs associated with implementation of the plan for a given budget year, but that they should be presented in a multi-year fashion.

In the meantime, there seemed to be a consensus that updates on the implementation of the Vermont Futures Plan, including cost estimates, should be presented to the Joint Fiscal Committee on a regular basis.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Joint Fiscal Office