



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

SENATOR EDWARD J. KENNEDY

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July 19, 2021

The Honorable Julian Cyr, Senate Chair
The Honorable Adrian Madaro, House Chair
The Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery
Massachusetts State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Cyr and Chairman Madaro,

As the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery considers measures related to creating resiliency in mental health and behavioral health care systems, I am testifying today to bring **S.1300 – A Resolve to ensure delivery of mental health services to adults with acute mental illness** to your attention.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, 3.7 percent or nearly 18,000 adults in Massachusetts live with serious mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression.

In 2019, 274,000 adults in Massachusetts reported having had serious thoughts of suicide.

Only 53.8 percent of adults with mental illness in Massachusetts receive any form of treatment from either the public system or private providers. The remaining 46.2 percent receive no mental health treatment.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic we talked often about mental health being a priority for the Commonwealth. After what we have all been through during the last year and a half, the focus on mental health needs to be sharper than ever. While Massachusetts ranks highly among states for providing access to mental health services, we can and need to do better. We cannot afford to leave thousands of people behind.

As state lawmakers, we need to start by ensuring that the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health is properly staffed and supported and has the capacity to assist Massachusetts residents in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. That is what this bill aims to do.

If passed, this resolve would create a special commission to study the staffing levels and delivery of services for case managers at the Department of Mental Health tasked with serving adults with acute mental illness. The commission will be tasked with examining individual sites in terms of number of case managers working at each site and their respective average caseload as well as

examining the number of adults with acute mental illness who were refused service and the reasons that service was denied.

The commission will also explore options for ensuring services for all adults with acute mental illness, and the ability to manage a caseload effectively for each case manager employed by the Department of Mental Health.

The commission will consider the feasibility of reestablishing outpatient clinics as a means of achieving these goals and as a means of reducing the waitlists at community clinics and private practices. The commission will also examine language accessibility issues and linguistic capacity in the realm of mental health work. One of the goals of the commission will be to study recruitment strategies and develop incentives for people to pursue careers in the mental health field and case work in particular.

The make-up of the 11-member commission, to be chaired by the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, is spelled out in the legislation. The resolve seeks at least \$100,000 from federal COVID-19 relief funding received by the state to be utilized to provide funding for the commission's study. Once complete, the study and its recommendations will be filed with the Legislature.

Untreated and undertreated mental illness creates ripple effects that impact not only the person suffering from the illness, but their family, friends, and society as a whole. When left untreated, mental illness can lead to a person's inability to hold a steady job and care for themselves and others, increases in substance abuse disorders, domestic violence, and death by suicide.

By treating mental illness effectively and early, we can, in many cases, limit not only the human toll these diseases take on society, but also the financial costs associated with additional health care, the loss of productivity and earnings, and other associated consequences.

I hope that you share my position on the importance of this matter and report favorably on this legislation.

Sincerely,



Sen. Edward J. Kennedy
First Middlesex District



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