

4/6/16

Dear Community Stakeholder:

An article in the April 3rd edition of *The Pantagraph* entitled "Counseling Center Helps Fill Mental Health Services Gap" addressed some of the issues surrounding community mental health services in McLean County. As the community's mental health center, the McLean County Center for Human Services (CHS) applauds the commitment of both partner agencies and volunteer counselors who offer their assistance to people in need. Everyone plays an important role.

Unfortunately, there were significant errors in the article about CHS's role in the community and inaccurate statements attributed to us. We realize it is unrealistic to expect that every piece of reporting on CHS will be error-free. However, we are compelled to issue corrections when misinformation may prevent the most vulnerable of our community from seeking and receiving the services they need.

The article reported CHS "will no longer accept new clients to its psychiatric program." This is inaccurate. CHS has not cut off psychiatric services to all new clients. The article also stated "CHS said its \$6 million in reserves will be used for building repairs, information technology upgrades and unforeseen emergencies, and not for services the state has failed to cover." This is also inaccurate. We have been and are continuing to use reserves to meet numerous service needs.

After reading the article, I emailed *The Pantagraph* and asked, "Who are you quoting in your article?" *The Pantagraph* responded "I was repeating recent information from Paul's article on your cutbacks from the state." It is true that a Paul Swiech article was published on March 22nd which accurately detailed our challenges. However, the April 3rd article misreported several key details from Paul's March 22nd piece. I have attached Paul's article for reference.

Here's the correct information as reported by Paul Swiech:

- McLean County's mental health center - which serves the people with the greatest needs and fewest resources- **is limiting the number of new clients to its psychiatric program.**
- "We'll be significantly limiting the number of new patients we can accept into the program," Barr said. **"We'll continue to take the highest risk referrals who are an imminent danger to themselves or others."**
- CHS has made adjustments and has covered expenses **by using reserves** but hoped a state budget would be approved and the money would be reimbursed.
- CHS - which also has cut two administrative positions - **will have used \$900,000 in reserves** by the end of this fiscal year.
- **"Without the reserves**, we would have made significant cuts across the Board." Barr said.

The most damaging consequence of the April 3rd article is that "the highest risk referrals who are an imminent danger to themselves or others" may not contact us, or be referred to us, because it has been reported CHS "will no longer accept new clients to its psychiatric program." This puts the entire community at risk. CHS will not abandon our core mission. **We want you to know the truth and ask you to share the correct information with other community stakeholders and those in need.**

Over the past several years, our community has pulled together like none other in the state to address the needs of people with mental illness. The Center for Human Services has been proud to play an important role in that process. Unfortunately, a lack of complete and accurate information on the front page of *The Pantagraph* is detrimental to the very collaborative spirit to which we and so many other community stakeholders are committed.

On behalf of the staff and board of directors of the McLean County Center for Human Services, I greatly appreciate the many contributions made by community professionals who serve the most vulnerable of our community. We look forward to our continued partnership in providing care to individuals who have the greatest needs and fewest resources.

As an important community stakeholder, I encourage you to contact me directly if you have additional questions or need further clarification. I can be reached at 309-827-5351 or at tbarr@mcchs.org.

Respectfully,

Tom Barr, Executive Director

McLean County Center for Human Services