

October 21, 2016

The Honorable Chris Christie
Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Christie:

As Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Care Plus NJ, I have a fiduciary duty to express my concerns and give voice the distressed community that is being threatened by recent policy proposals.

I would like to acknowledge your efforts to increase access to integrated care through the expansion of Behavioral Health Homes. As experts on the state Medicaid model, the professional team at Care Plus has affirmed the effectiveness and the demand for such services in helping the vulnerable serious mental illness and substance abuse populations.

Across the state, community-based behavioral health leaders are justifiably requesting a reversal of the proposal by the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services to shift from deficit funding contracts to a Fee-for-Service only model. In it's present form, the proposal will have a devastating effect on individual communities and the state as a whole.

Our calculations and those of our peers, show that the proposed numbers do not add up, specifically for outpatient services. The analysis indicates **a collective loss of \$12-13 million dollars statewide** in annual psychiatric and behavioral health funding for outpatient programs alone. From my perspective, **it is financially irresponsible for Board Members, as business professionals, to allow for our organization to continue operations under these circumstances.**

Please note some of the consequences that will ultimately result in the **destabilization of the community-based behavioral health system and the resultant disturbance of peace for many New Jersey citizens in need of services:**

- A significant number of clients currently enrolled in services will lose access.
- We will be unable to help the poor and the working poor who can't afford services.
- There is a shortage of inpatient beds, which is burdening emergency rooms and hospitals. This will increase without the safety-net of outpatient services.



- Many individuals with mental illness are undiagnosed or untreated and end up homeless or incarcerated. There is little hope for these patients to reintegrate safely into the community without access to safety-net outpatient services.
- The demand for behavioral health services is increasing, as demonstrated by the fact that suicide rates are at a 30 year high and New Jersey is in the midst of a heroin and opioid epidemic. Without safety-net outpatient services, there will be nothing to catch these people as they fall from the social fabric.
- “Cutbacks in financing for mental health services have put [police officers] on the front lines of dealing with many people who have psychiatric disorders [...] Police officers have been forced to play dual roles as law enforcers and psychiatric social workers.” – New York Times

The proposed policy changes are not budget neutral. The contracts that community-based organizations have received through the state for over 40 years have allowed for the absorption of a number of financial obstacles, but the resources have now run dry. **Our operations are at high-risk, and an increase in proposed funding is necessary in order to maintain the quantity and quality of services currently provided.**

It is my most fervent desire that the policy changes be reconsidered with an increase in the rates, especially for psychiatry, and a 12-month extension on the transition period out of the state contracts. That will give the community-based mental health industry much needed time to adjust to the proposed payment model.

The goal of the community is to work with the state to come to a resolution that will best serve all of the children, families and adults in New Jersey.

Sincerely,

William W. Weiss
Care Plus NJ, Inc.
Chairman of the Board

