

I am here to comment on Agenda Item #6 and request that the steering committee go back to the basics and uphold the MHSA as it was intended. You may do this by ensuring that there is a robust CPP and complete transparency from our leadership. The MHSA was intended to be a paradigm shift that elevates the clients and family voice, and puts individuals with lived experience in the driver's seat.

Let us never go back to a culture of everything about us without us.

System Client & Family Advocates Should Remain Independent

Cal Voices has held the System Advocate positions for well over two decades. Due to their historical purpose and the nature of their responsibilities, it is important that they remain with a contracted client run advocacy agency to avoid conflicts of interest and prevent co-optation. System Advocates must faithfully promote the interests and priorities of clients and family members, which do not always align with those of the County.

As the World Health Organization stated in its 2003 publication, Advocacy for Mental Health:

Advocacy groups need independence from government in order to achieve their goals. While a good relationship and even financial support from government can be very useful to both parties, there is often a need for outside advocacy. History has repeatedly shown that governments can seriously violate human rights, including those of people with mental disorders. In many instances where this has happened the independence of nongovernmental organizations has been essential in enabling them to advocate for the rights of those affected and to promote change. [...]

[A]dvocacy groups should be careful not to lose strength by developing too close a relationship with government. ... From the government standpoint it is important to work with advocacy groups that may oppose government policy and to try to understand their perspectives.¹

The System Advocate roles were developed with these considerations in mind. To be effective, System Advocates must remain independent. And to ensure the County maintains its commitment to positive system transformation, these positions must work for an agency that possesses the requisite experience and expertise to promote the community's vision for meaningful change.

This is a sad day for Sacramento County. We went from being the first county in the state to create these Advocacy/ leadership positions. Our BH Board and BOS were thoughtful enough to ensure that these critical positions were housed within a peer run organization. We are now faced with a new Director who is trying to recreate Riversides PMHS. However, this is Sacramento and we value

¹ See https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/services/1_advocacy_WEB_07.pdf, pp. 24-25.

community-based systems and providers. If we go down this road, Sacramento will go from leading the state to disgracing the peer movement. This will be destroying long standing relationships and eroding the communities trust. What we need is more transparency, and more accountability from our leadership and that starts with the Community Planning Process.

Andrea Crook