IMPORTANT!
Visit your Legislators and Contact the Governor!
Tell them we need:
Essential Funding for Essential MH/MR Services!!

Both the House and Senate are working on the Budget, so NOW is the ideal time for Governor Schweiker and your legislators to hear from you. Even if you have already contacted the Governor and your local legislators on behalf of the Working Together Campaign, please meet with them as soon as possible. If you cannot meet with them, send them additional letters and/or call them IMMEDIATELY. Tell them we need essential funding for essential MH/MR services.

Legislators need to continually hear from their constituents. Your visits to them, and visits by consumers and families provide tangible evidence of constituent support and reason for the legislators to be supportive of your needs. Remind legislators that MH/MR services must have a 2% COLA to allow them to maintain essential services. Thank them for their support and efforts so far, and assure them that you, your staff, consumers and their family members and other community members are behind them in their effort to add a 2% COLA to the Governor’s budget proposal.

Governor Schweiker needs to know how important this issue is to Pennsylvanians. Let him know that a 2% COLA is needed in order for the recruitment and retention funds to have the positive impact he envisioned. Over 43,000** people are employed by MH and MR agencies, serving and supporting more than 310,000 Pennsylvanians.

In your letters, don’t forget to mention that nearly 19,000 individuals have signed the Working Together Campaign Petition in support of the MH/MR Coalition Principles, and the number is still growing. Use this as an example of the tremendous community support behind the recruitment and retention initiative. Feel free to include the MH/MR Coalition Budget Request and Statement of Need with your letters.

Addresses

Governor Mark Schweiker  
225 Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable xxx  
[Senate or House] PO Box xxxxxx  
Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

(The Senate box number is 2030** - the last 2 digits will be your senator’s district number. All House members use box 202020.)

Please contact one of the associations listed below if you have questions or if you need additional Coalition materials.

**1999 LBFC Report on Salary Levels in Community-Based MH/MR Programs
BUDGET REQUEST
For Fiscal Year 2002 - 2003

2% COLA NEEDED FOR MH/MR COMMUNITY SERVICES

WHY?

❖ RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS CONTINUES ❖
❖ ESSENTIAL SERVICES TO PEOPLE JEOPARDIZED ❖
❖ HEALTH AND SAFETY OF INDIVIDUALS AT RISK ❖
❖ UNFUNDED MANDATES EXPAND ❖

REINSTATE: A 2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for the following line-item appropriations in the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) budget:

❖ Community Mental Retardation Services
❖ Pennhurst Dispersal
❖ Mental Health Services
❖ MR Residential Services - Lansdowne

The Mental Health/Mental Retardation Coalition (Coalition) continues its ongoing efforts to assure that the Commonwealth meets its obligations regarding the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals and their families who are receiving and requesting community MH/MR services. Attached is the Coalition’s FY 2002-2003 Funding Needs Statement summarizing this advocacy effort.

Essential MH/MR services, as established by laws, regulations and court decisions rely almost exclusively upon state and federal funding. The Coalition recognizes that the General Assembly and the Executive Office face a difficult task due to the economic situation in Pennsylvania. Therefore, the Coalition request is for a nominal COLA percentage increase.

Inadequate or absent COLAs during the past fifteen years created the current recruitment and retention crisis despite the best efforts of individuals, families, counties, providers and advocates. This year, the Governor’s Budget does not include a COLA for any of the above services.

With the rapidly escalating costs of health insurance and property casualty insurance, along with increasing unfunded mandates related to new state and federal requirements (e.g. HIPAA), we believe that the impact of no COLA will reduce the number of people that can be served. The Olmstead decision obligates the Commonwealth to fully serve all persons entered into the waiver. To fully serve all persons in the waiver without receiving a COLA means that people who need services will lose any hope of getting them. We earnestly request your advocacy for a COLA for Community MH/MR services.
The MH/MR Coalition includes all of the major associations that represent mental health and/or mental retardation provider agencies and counties in Pennsylvania: Mental Health Associations in PA, MH/MR Program Administrators Association of PA, PA Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, PA Association of Resources for People with Mental Retardation, PA Community Providers Association, The Arc of PA, and United Cerebral Palsy of PA.

MH/MR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

FISCAL YEAR 2002-2003 FUNDING NEEDS

- A Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for line-item appropriations addressing community mental health and mental retardation services that equals the projected rate of inflation.
- Continuation of the multi-year commitment begun in FY2001-2002 by the Ridge Administration to address the recruitment and retention crisis with additional state funding.
- Additional state funding of $82.5 million to meet the need identified in 1999 of $100 million of additional funding.
- Workforce development and generation of an economic stimulus during the current global economic crisis by approving additional state funding for recruitment and retention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION SUPPORTING THESE FUNDING NEEDS

1. Pennsylvania has historically been a national leader in providing services and opportunities for individuals with mental retardation and individuals with mental illness in the community. The recent Olmstead decision by the United States Supreme Court and the implementation of the Court’s Order by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS), particularly in Olmstead Updates No. 4 and No. 5 issued in January, 2001, further clarify the Commonwealth’s responsibility in providing necessary services and in stating the entitlement that accrues to individuals with these disabilities. Update No. 5 identifies the issue of recruitment and retention as an example of how federal grant monies can be utilized in meeting the Olmstead mandates. Likewise, recommendation #5 of the recent Federal CMS review of PA’s home and community-based waiver services found that “The level of funding for waiver services is less than required to provide quality services,” and told the Commonwealth, “Reimbursement levels for waiver services must be set so they are sufficient to attract qualified and competent staff.”

2. The Mental Health/Mental Retardation Coalition (Coalition) is a stakeholder group of county, provider and advocacy associations supported by consumers, families and direct care professionals advocating additional state funding for the recruitment and retention crisis.

3. In 1999 the Coalition identified an initial funding need of $100 million state dollars required to begin addressing the recruitment and retention crisis resulting from years of underfunding existing services. The $100 million two-year request was based upon several factors inherent in the MH/MR community services system. The system is funded almost entirely by state and federal sources with limited or nonexistent private pay or other third-party reimbursement revenues. This dependency upon government funding requires regular and adequate cost of living adjustments to base funding allocations in order to assure that program quality and service goals and objectives are achieved.

4. The FY 2001-2002 state budget proposed by Governor Ridge and approved by the General Assembly included a multi-year special initiative of a 2% funding increase, equaling $17.5 million in additional state funds for this purpose, together with a general 2% cost of living adjustment to various MH/MR line-item appropriations. Bipartisan support for this initiative was overwhelming. The Coalition continues advocating the need for $82.5 million in additional state funding to meet the need of $100 million additional state dollars identified in 1999 for this initiative.
These “talking points” are intended to help you, your direct care staff and families engage in discussions with state Representatives and Senators regarding: (1) the continuing recruitment/retention crisis; (2) the “essential” nature of community MH/MR supports and services; (3) your concern for quality services in order to assure that the health and safety of individuals are at risk; and (4) the impact of unfunded mandates on your agency’s operations. Please let your MH/MR Coalition member organization know what contacts have been made as soon as possible so there can be additional follow-up with legislators in their Harrisburg office.

1. **STATE THE 2% COLA STATE FUNDING GOAL:** Our Funding Request for FY2002-2003 is to add to the Governor’s budget proposal a 2% COLA (cost of living adjustment) for MH/MR community services and supports. Should you be asked what level of funding this goal requires, we estimate the amount is $23 million and emphasize that funding for these services is primarily only from state and federal sources.

2. **EXPLAIN WHAT YOU ARE DOING TO REACH THAT GOAL:** You are a member or supporter of the MH/MR Coalition which, since 1999, has been meeting with officials in the Department of Public Welfare, the Governor’s Budget Office, Executive Staff to the Governor and members of the General Assembly advocating additional state funding for community mental health and mental retardation services.

3. **DESCRIBE HOW THE COLA WILL HELP FUND ESSENTIAL SERVICES:** Explain how important qualified direct care staff is to a person with mental retardation or mental illness and to their ability to achieve their maximum developmental potential. Explain that approximately 77,000 individuals with mental retardation and more than 250,000 individuals with mental illness are currently served in the community.

4. **TELL YOUR PERSONAL STORY AND SPEAK FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES:** If you are a provider, describe how difficult it is to get people in the door, to train them and to encourage them to stay due to low wages. If you are a direct care staff person, describe how you enjoy the work but it is difficult for you to stay because of the low wages. If you are a family member, describe how staff vacancies, turnover of staff, etc., impacts the quality of care your loved one receives and the impact this has on their health, safety and quality of life.

5. **REQUEST THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE 2% COLA:** Ask your legislators to support a 2% COLA in additional state funding for community mental retardation and mental health services to assure the health and safety of individuals with mental retardation and individuals with mental illness. Ask them to communicate their support by writing letters to their leadership, colleagues and Governor Schweiker.

6. **THANK THEM:** Thank the legislator for his or her consideration and support. Offer to provide additional information if they need it, including the MH/MR Coalition Budget Request and Statement of FY2002-2003 Funding Needs (either leave materials if you contacted your legislator by office visit, or include them as an attachment to a letter or send separately if you contacted the legislator by phone).