

January 5, 2022

Good morning,

My name is Voneka Bennett and I am speaking on behalf of the Prince William County Community Services Board. I serve as a Board Member, and I represent the Woodbridge Magisterial District.

I would like to address the need for a Crisis Receiving Center; the need for additional CSB staff; and the need for local in-patient psychiatric beds.

Funding for a Crisis Receiving Center is desperately needed in Prince William County. A Crisis Receiving center would provide our residents with a safe environment where they can receive treatment when they are experiencing a mental health emergency. Many people in our community who have experienced a mental health crisis reported that they were traumatized because we currently do not have a facility to address their needs. Here are some of their horror stories:

Someone reported that they were intimidated and afraid by having to go to an emergency room when they were in crisis. While waiting in the emergency room to receive treatment, they were put in a dark, cold room with cinder blocks, left alone, and without a phone, – suffering for hours while in crisis.

Someone else reported that they went to the hospital for help because they were in a mental health crisis; instead of receiving the treatment that they needed, they were involuntarily hospitalized because our current hospital doesn't have the capacity or knowledge to handle mental health crises appropriately.

Another person reported that they were transferred 3 hours away to a psychiatric hospital because our County simply does not have enough beds to accommodate our citizens living with mental illness. And the stories continue...

A Crisis Receiving Center would greatly assist our community in meeting the demand for crisis services. It would also divert persons away from psychiatric care. Adequate funding is critical and necessary to meet these demands.

The total cost for standing up a Crisis Receiving Center is estimated to be \$14 million, and estimated to cost \$7.4 million annually to operate. Currently, there are no monies allocated to cover the complete cost for standing up and maintaining a Crisis Receiving Center. We need to address this critical need by establishing a Crisis Receiving Center.

The demand for Emergency Behavioral Health Services in Prince William County continues and is now on the rise. In Fiscal Year 2021, the Emergency Services Program conducted more than 3,000 emergency evaluations; averaging 264 each month. In Fiscal Year 2022, we have seen an increase in the demand for Emergency Services. We are now averaging 272 emergency evaluations each month.

The increased demand for CSB services has also resulted in workforce shortages. Some of our staff have to work extra shifts, resulting in exhaustion and burnout. In addition, about 10-15% of CSB positions are not filled because we lack the funds to offer higher and competitive salaries. CSB staff are leaving because of increasing workloads AND increasing administrative regulations that fail to add value AND fail to appropriately compensate CSB staff. We need funding to strengthen the CSB workforce with qualified applicants. We also need funding to retain qualified staff.

Prince William County consistently has the highest percentage of persons under a Temporary Detention Order (TDO) sent out of the area due to the lack of local psychiatric beds. So far, in the current Fiscal Year, 52% of all adults and children under a TDO in PWC were placed in a psychiatric bed outside of Prince William County. This creates a huge hardship on the individual and their family.

Please provide adequate funding to the Prince William County Community Services Board to assist those living with mental illness and to ensure that there is adequate staff to serve their needs.