

**LOUISIANA
MENTAL HEALTH
ADVOCACY
SERVICE &
CHILD ADVOCACY
PROGRAM**

House Concurrent
Resolution No. 25

Proposed Initiatives to
Ensure More Efficient
Operations

Fiscal Year 2016-2017



submitted by:

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House Concurrent Resolution Number 25 urges and requests each department of the executive branch of state government to submit a report outlining the initiatives the department will take to ensure a more efficient operation for Fiscal year 2016-2017 and beyond.

Below are the proposed initiatives for the Mental Health Advocacy Service (MHAS).

DEPARTMENT STRUCTURES & PROCESSES

MHAS has developed a clear and concise parish listing for each of its offices [Baton Rouge, Jackson, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Mandeville/Northshore, New Orleans, Pineville and Shreveport] to ensure that geographical areas are being covered in the most cost-effective way possible and eliminating the possibility of overlapping activities of staff.

Due to its statewide network of law offices, MHAS attorneys can, and will continue to, communicate with counterparts in closer proximity to where their clients are placed, thus saving travel expenses and staff productivity.

PROCUREMENT

Attorneys will continue to utilize as many free/reduced continuing legal education opportunities as available, and continue to serve as presenters at various conferences affording free/reduced attendance to themselves and others within the agency.

In the current fiscal year, MHAS partnered with the Louisiana State Supreme Court, Court Improvement Program and The Pelican Center to leverage federal grant dollars to replace the agency's antiquated data collection/case management system.

MHAS has taken advantage of a program with the Louisiana State Supreme Court, Court Improvement Program to annually update Louisiana Children's Code law books for the agency's Child In Need of Care attorneys, and will continue this practice.

Of MHAS' eight offices, rent is only paid for four; Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Shreveport and Lake Charles. The remaining offices have space that has been donated by various hospitals across the state. MHAS will continue to utilize these arrangements as possible to reduce the overhead costs of maintaining an open office.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

MHAS is in the process of establishing online access for all travel reimbursements, payroll processes and available human resources documents. As most of these documents currently must be generated in one office and mailed to another for processing and approval, moving to an electronic system will save on printing and mailing costs, as well as staff productivity.

A recently updated case management/data collection system (see Procurement above) allows MHAS and its attorneys to efficiently and effectively manage its clients/cases. As this system is web-based, the amount of paper and physical copies needed on hand by the attorneys is reduced, saving printing and supply costs.

DUPLICATION OF SERVICES

MHAS is not aware of a duplication of services in either of its activities.

ELIMINATION/IMPROVEMENT OF INEFFECTIVE/INEFFICIENT ACTIVITIES

MHAS provides two activities to the citizens of Louisiana;

1. **Mental Health Advocacy** - ensures that the legal rights of children and adults in behavioral health facilities are protected in accordance with a federal court order, *Brad G. v. Treen*, C.A. #81-1094 (E.D. La.), and with state law, L.R.S. 28:2 (14), by: (1) making legal representation available to the respondent in every civil commitment proceeding in Louisiana; (2) providing legal representation during the initial stages of confinement for every indigent person involuntarily admitted for mental health treatment; (3) providing legal representation for every person who has been civilly committed, subsequent to their civil commitment and; (4) providing legal representation for children at risk of being committed to mental institutions. The program also acts as a clearinghouse for information relative to the rights of mentally disabled persons and provides training for close to 600 persons annually, and sitting on numerous boards and commissions in the community. The MHAS also addresses numerous “systems” issues (issues that affect the rights of more than one person with mental disabilities and require a change in policy or practice to be remedied).
2. **Child Advocacy Program** - provides legal representation for children in abuse and neglect proceedings in accordance with Ch. Code Art. 607.

Both of these activities have been deemed to be 100% nondiscretionary as the services that they provide are constitutionally and/or statutorily mandated, as well as being protected by a federal court order in the case of mental health advocacy. Neither activity can be recommended for elimination and it is the belief of MHAS that both activities perform as effectively and efficiently as possible.