

Department of County Human Services CBAC

March 12, 2006

Dear Chair Linn & Commissioners,

Our CBAC has again been given the difficult task of reviewing the Program Offers for the Department of County Human Services. All told, there are 88 offers to review that were submitted by the four DCHS Divisions: Developmental Disabilities Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Aging and Disability Services, and the Domestic Violence Coordinator's Office. The department is requesting an additional \$9 million in County General Funds and the need for these services continues to increase. We are aware of the County's funding shortfall and realize that the challenge of choosing which offers are funded is not an easy one. We do not envy your task.

We want one message to be clear. We are very concerned about the proposed "realignment" of DCHS. We have not seen written material that presents of any compelling rationale for this action. We do not see convincing evidence that the "realignment" will result in increased savings or better services. Further, we are concerned that this additional organizational change will have the opposite effect of diverting attention away from services at all levels of the organization and toward focusing more on the internal bureaucratic reorganization process. We are also worried that this reorganization will result in a further fragmentation of services. Therefore, we recommend that the entire idea be reconsidered.

Since we were not asked to do so, we have not ranked the program offers this year. However, when we reviewed the offers, it became apparent that even though we have been given more data, we still had questions about the efficiency of certain programs. And we did not initially have sufficient information to derive satisfactory answers to those questions. Examples: 1) PO#25105 – Mental Health Services for Transition Aged Youth. This program appeared to serve seven individuals next year at a cost of \$159,709. This would total \$21,428 per person. 2) PO#25094 – A& D Youth Residential Treatment. This program appeared to target only 21 youths at a cost \$299,579. This would total \$14,265 per youth. Recently, we learned that these programs were serving slots of individuals and would therefore be providing services to many more people than indicated. So while the outcome and output measures are useful and needed, we urge that the information provided be clearly presented, which it was not in these instances. In the future, all relevant information needs to be provided so that we can understand the costs required in providing a service. We recommend that you continue to push for these kinds of measures along

with more frequent reporting. Quarterly reporting would be our recommendation.

We understand that the County has less than “full funding” for all the services provided. In addition, the Chair has promised to open the new jail and give Portland Public Schools \$5 million. With all these demands for critical services, a couple of the program offers seemed questionable. Example: PO’s#25078A and B - Culturally Competent Mental Health Services. These two offers are requesting a little more than \$3.5 million for “expanding current infrastructure and capacity” of providers in various minority populations. This is not buying services for minority clients. These program offers are providing “the ability to build infrastructure and service capacity”. We were recently told that developing this infrastructure was necessary in order to deliver services effectively. However, some of us still have doubts about this. In an atmosphere of seemingly endless budget cutbacks, we believe that the focus should be on providing services. We can and should require that all services be provided in a culturally appropriate manner, but we remain uncertain as to whether these kinds of program offers will further that goal.

Finally, we have heard that there was going to be much more emphasis on program offers that collaborated with other County departments. These were to be called Joint Offers. The idea is that Joint Offers would take advantage of common objectives, and be more efficient and effective. Yet we do not see many Joint Offers. We know that there is a lot of crossover between DCHS, DCJ and Health. We were somewhat disappointed that we do not see more effort being placed on working together to serve the client’s needs. We recommend that more effort be made in this direction.

Sincerely,

Steve Weiss, Chair
Lenore Bijan
Rachel Kibble
Faye Mack
John Richmond
Jeanne Robertson