



## DISABILITIES RIGHTS CENTER, Inc.

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#### DISABILITIES RIGHTS CENTER RESPONDS TO NAMI CALL TO ACTION ON MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Concord, NH: The Disabilities Rights Center, which represents individuals with mental illness in a class action lawsuit against the State of New Hampshire for their failure to provide adequate community mental health services, supports NAMI's call to action to address the State's ongoing mental health system crisis. It is important to emphasize that the solution to the crisis will not be found in an increase in the number of costly institutional beds, but in a community mental health system that has the capacity to serve individuals in their homes and communities.

The growing numbers of people held in hospital emergency rooms due to a psychiatric crisis is not caused by a lack of beds at New Hampshire Hospital. It is a symptom of a more systemic problem: the lack of adequate community based care. A community mental health system with sufficient supports would divert people from hospitalization in the first instance, as well as provide the continuum of care necessary to allow for the discharge of individuals from New Hampshire Hospital when they are medically ready to return to the community.

The NH Department of Health and Human Services recently released a statement announcing that it planned to address the current crisis in part by opening 12 new beds at New Hampshire Hospital. At best, this is a band-aid solution that may temporarily reduce the number of people being held in emergency rooms. It continues the State's overreliance on institutions rather than on a robust community system that can prevent hospitalization. Without increasing the capacity of the community mental health system, those 12 beds will be filled, while those ready to be discharged will remain in the hospital awaiting the services that would allow them to return to the community.

Taskforce and commission reports released over the past 10 years by the State and by independent analysts, as well as recent findings by the United States Department of Justice, document the erosion of community mental health services. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in the hospitalization and institutionalization of people who could live successfully in the community: between 2002 and 2011, adult admissions to New Hampshire Hospital doubled. The appropriate response to this crisis is to rebuild the community system, not to expand the use of costly institutions. Psychiatric hospitalization is the most expensive form of care, and prolonged, unnecessary and repeated hospitalizations can be devastating to individuals.

Clinically effective community mental health services have been proven to help people with serious mental illness recover, live meaningful lives and avoid unnecessary and expensive hospitalizations. Assertive Community Treatment Teams and mobile crisis intervention, for example, provide services to individuals in their homes and in other community settings and are effective methods for the prevention of psychiatric hospitalizations. When necessary, they have access to crisis respite beds, keeping people out of emergency rooms that are ill-equipped to provide the psychiatric care that people need. Supportive housing and supported employment promote recovery, engage individuals in community life, and ensure there is early intervention to keep crises from arising.

The Disabilities Rights Center calls on the Governor and Department of Health and Human Services to provide the vision, will, and leadership to set the State on a course to fix the real problem in NH's mental health service delivery system. The State needs to implement the community based services that will create a system of care to keep people from being unnecessarily held in emergency rooms or suffering from unnecessary, prolonged, or repeated hospitalizations at New Hampshire Hospital.

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For more information regarding the mental health lawsuit, *Lynn E. v. Lynch*, visit our website at [www.drcnh.org](http://www.drcnh.org).