

4-27-2021

SC Senate Medical Affairs Committee  
Attention: Research Director  
PO Box 142  
412 Gressette Building  
Columbia, SC 29202

Distinguished Members of the SC Senate Medical Affairs Committee,

We, the Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center Board of Directors, are writing to express our concern about the current version of S.2 Restructuring DHEC, DMH and DAODAS. We support any efforts which will improve care and services for individuals diagnosed with mental illness. S.2 reorganizes DMH and other state agencies; however, does not appear to provide improvement or efficiencies to the delivery of mental health care in South Carolina. We are gravely concerned that S.2 could negatively impact mental health care across the state.


At the present time, South Carolina is facing a mental health crisis due to the well-publicized increases in serious anxiety and depression among children and adults as a result of the increased isolation and adverse economic impacts of the pandemic. Sustained stress will have serious health and social consequences. This does not seem like the appropriate time to change the governance structure of DMH by eliminating the Mental Health Commission and making DMH a Division in a large cabinet agency. DMH leadership should remain focused on the delivery of mental health care to patients in need to address this crisis.

SCDMH has functioned well as a stand-alone agency with nationally recognized treatment programs. In 2020, SCDMH completed a year-long review by the House Legislative Oversight Committee. No recommendations were made to change SCDMH's health care delivery system.

The agency has been governed by an appointed board of citizens for almost 200 years. The Department's current Mental Health Commission traces its origins to the Board of Regents of the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum, first appointed in 1827. Additional study and discussion should occur before doing away with a form of governance which has generally worked well.

A major advantage of the Commission form of governance has been the stable leadership it has brought to DMH. The average tenure of State Mental Health Directors in the United States is 2.5 years. At the time of his retirement, at the end of 2018, the Department's previous Director had served for over 12 years, and was the longest serving State Mental Health Director in America.

Sincerely,

  
Dr. Rosa Ishmal, Board Chair-Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center Board of Directors  
Pastor Dale Reeves, Board Vice-Chair  
Dr. Abe Moskow  
Robin Gable, RN  
Mrs. Janie Key  
Mrs. Marion Gary  
Mr. Barry Head  
Mrs. Terry Lee  
Mr. Lowell Koppert