

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA  
JANUARY 11, 2016**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a work session on Monday, January 11, 2016 in the Community Room at the Pasquotank County Library.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Joseph S. Winslow, Jr., Chairman  
Cecil Perry, Vice-Chairman  
Jeff Dixon  
Lloyd E. Griffin, III  
Dr. William Sterritt  
Frankie Meads  
Bettie Parker

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Rodney Bunch, County Manager  
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney  
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board  
Shelley Cox, Planning Director

The work session was called to order at 3:00 PM by Chairman Winslow. He said the purpose of today's work session is to provide an update on the county's Stepping Up Plan, which is an initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in Albemarle District Jail.

Shelly Cox, Planning Director passed out a handout.

**1. UPDATE ON STEPPING UP PLAN:**

Mrs. Cox stated that back in the fall the Board approved a resolution to support the NC Association of County Commissioner's Call to Action to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in county Jails. She said in doing so, they agreed to utilize resources available through the Stepping Up Initiative and to convene a diverse team of leaders and decision makers from multiple community agencies. The team, which included Bland Baker - Trillium Health Resources, Captain James Cox - Albemarle District Jail, Officer Tonya Jennings - N.C. Probation on Parole, Administrator Robert G. Jones - Albemarle District Jail, Officer Luke Marcum - Elizabeth City Police Department, Jerry Parks - Albemarle Regional Health Services, and Lieutenant Bill Ward - Pasquotank County Sheriff's Department was tasked with developing a plan to safely reduce the number of people with mental illness in Albemarle District Jail. She said one of the main concerns of members is the mental health system itself, because it is not functioning the way it should, which is causing a lot of strain on the local criminal justice agencies.

Mrs. Cox said according to the National Alliance of Mental Illness, approximately 335,000 adults and 99,000 children in North Carolina are living with serious mental health conditions. It is estimated that only 34 percent of these adults are provided services under the public mental health system and approximately 8,200 are incarcerated in prisons across the state.

Mrs. Cox noted that on the local level, mental illness has a significant impact on both our community and criminal justice system. Of the 520 people currently on probation in Pasquotank County, 232 have been identified as having mental health needs and 327 have some form of substance abuse issues. From October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015, Albemarle District Jail referred 319 detainees out of a total population of 1,698 for mental health treatment. During the same period, the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Department expended 1,516 man hours driving 91,012 miles in order to transport individuals suffering from severe mental illness to hospitals across the state. She said this does not include the numerous hours that local law enforcement were required to sit with patients at Sentara Albemarle Medical Center awaiting treatment for mental illness.

Mrs. Cox said as the Stepping Up Team began the process of developing this plan, the overwhelming sentiment expressed by the team members was that the current mental health

system is broken. Until a significant, meaningful overhaul of the entire mental health system is implemented at the state and national levels, jails and prisons will continue to function as informal mental institutions. She said with that being said, the team was able to identify some local strategies that could assist in reducing the number of people with mental illness in Albemarle District Jail. She noted one of the things identified as a big problem is lack of available beds in mental health facilities because they are already at capacity.

Mrs. Cox stated that Lieutenant Ward conducted a review of the documents maintained by the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office concerning the transportation of mental patients for the calendar years 2010 through 2015 and it was very alarming. For that five year period, the Sheriff's Office traveled a total of 415,585 miles and expended a total of 6,961 man hours. In addition to the man hours expended for travel, during that same time period, the wait time expended while supervising and observing patients at the hospital before placement totaled 2,436 man hours.

Mrs. Cox said the team broke up the strategies in three different phases:

1) Before arrest and on the street

Improve access to early care before actions of a mentally ill citizen elevates to a criminal level.

- Pasquotank County and Sentara Albemarle should partner together to request an increase in the state and/or federal funding to help pay for mental health care for the uninsured.

Support expansion of state mental health treatment facilities.

- There are 55 state facilities, with the remainder being private. State facilities will not accept patients without denials from private facilities. This process is very time consuming and delays mental health care for those who have the greatest need.

Encourage Sentara Albemarle Medical Center to reduce emergency room wait times and follow the requirements of N.C.G.S. Chapter 122C.

- Taking people under voluntary admission and turning them into Involuntary Commitments strongly discourages voluntary admissions and further stresses manpower of local law enforcement.
- Since Sentara Albemarle is located in Pasquotank County, the Pasquotank Sheriff's Department and Elizabeth City Police Department share responsibility for serving IVCs. Law enforcement officers must then sit with the patient until transport to an available mental health facility which frequently involves an extended wait time.
- IVCs require secured transport by law enforcement from the patient's county of residence or by ambulance to a treatment facility.

Require that local law enforcement officers fully utilize CIT – Crisis Intervention Training.

- Training must be provided during time periods that officers can attend.
- New officers must be trained as soon as possible.
- Command must ensure officers are utilizing CIT training even when it will take more time and effort on the officer's part.

Expand Utilization of Mobile Crisis offered through Trillium Health Resources.

- Improve communication between Trillium Health Resources and local law enforcement so access problems can be addressed.

Promote public awareness and availability of local mental health resources.

- A Health Fair should be held for various public and private agencies to provide information and assistance to those suffering from mental illness and their families.

Track the utilization of Mobile Crisis by law enforcement through Central Communication call coding.

- An accurate record of mobile crisis calls and response times is needed to ensure adequate service is being provided by this service within the community.

2) Inside Albemarle District Jail

Ensure that ADJ detention officers are fully CIT trained and that they utilize the training.

- This training could be provided through Trillium Health Resources or ADJ's current tele-psychiatry contractor.

Continue use of mental health screening at initial processing.

- The Brief Jail Mental Health Screen is currently used and has been successful in helping to identify those in need of mental health services.

Continue utilizing tele-psychiatry services for those identified as a mental health risk.

- Albemarle District Jail currently spends \$19,200 per year for this service which has successfully identified inmates in need of mental health treatment with no transport required.

Support an expansion of the mental illness treatment ward of Central Prison

- The current cap at Central Prison frequently makes it difficult for Albemarle District Jail to get treatment for detainees with severe mental health needs.

3) Release and Re-entry into the Community

Provide detainees with a list of local mental health resources available upon their release.

- This list could be prepared with the assistance of Trillium and ARHS.

Support the development of a pilot program that provides follow-up care through Albemarle Regional Health Services.

- Follow-up treatment would be provided locally at ARHS through on-site care and tele-psychiatry.

Ensure access to follow-up care.

- Many offenders do not have insurance to pay for medication once released from jail.
- Adequate transportation to local treatment facilities is needed.

Expand local mental health and substance abuse provider availability.

- Explore the improvement and expansion of Mobile Crisis Providers.
- Encourage the expansion of PORT Human Services or the addition of new local substance abuse provider.

Mrs. Cox said untreated mental illness significantly impacts our local criminal justice system and is an added strain on Pasquotank County's budget. Many of the problems relating to the failure of our current mental health system will have to be addressed at the state and federal level. She stated that the strategies that are currently proposed could assist in reducing the number of mentally ill in Albemarle District Jail if they are initiated.

Mrs. Cox concluded that the Stepping Up Committee believes that this process should be ongoing and that the plan remains in a draft form. She said the process of developing this plan has resulted in newly opened dialogue between committee members and their agencies. The committee plans to continue meeting and explore ways that they can work together to address this issue at a local level.

Mr. Bland Baker, Trillium Health reported that Trillium is in the process of collecting information for their annual Needs and Gaps Analysis. Once that is complete, they will look at what our needs are and try to recruit new providers, because they have lost several due to various reasons. He noted that PORT is the only substance abuse provider in the area at this time. He said the Mobile Crisis unit is an excellent resource and is being utilized in our area. Commissioner Meads noted that a gentleman came and spoke to the Board about a year and a half ago regarding this.

Commissioner Griffin said he is very concerned about the number of law enforcement he sees across the state making transports. He questioned if the abandoned jail could be utilized by all three counties as a regional delivery point for transporting groups instead of individuals. Lieutenant Ward advised that the Sheriff's Office currently works in conjunction with Currituck, Camden, and Perquimans Counties on consolidating trips.

Commissioner Dixon said he sits on the State Mental Health Task Force and they came up with about 15 initiatives and presented them to the committee that oversees mental health. He said one of the initiatives addresses trying to remove local law enforcement out of the transportation end of it. Lieutenant Ward stated that the general statute does not say the Sheriff's Office has to do the transport, but it does say the county has to provide the transportation. He said the general statute also says the individuals insurance can be billed, but most of the individuals are indigents and do not have health insurance. Hiring a part-time billing person was discussed in the past and they are still researching that possibility.

Commissioner Perry said he has been on the jail commission for many years and has advocated finding ways to keep mental patients out of our local jail. He said he thinks it would be helpful to have someone from the District Attorney's Office on the committee because a lot of what is happening is determined by sentencing. He stated that sometimes people with mental illnesses will do things that are not proper, but it might not be necessary to incarcerate them. He said for instance a young man who was homeless and mentally ill was going into McDonalds every morning and washing up, the police were called. He was beat up, arrested, and put into jail and that may not have been the best sentence for him. He said he would like to see the committee include members that live in the community that are not members of law enforcement.

Chairman Winslow asked where the closest mental health facility is located. Lieutenant Ward answered there is one in Ahoskie, but noted that there are a limited number of beds at the facility. Chairman Winslow said it does not make sense to him why more has not been done to open up facilities locally since there is such a great need. He said there seems to be less emphasis on mental health in this area since East Carolina Behavioral Health, followed by Trillium took over. He stated that Trillium needs to understand that we need more local resources in place in Northeastern North Carolina to meet the needs of local residents.

Commissioner Parker said we need a robust setup for dealing with this. Recently the Northern Regional Advisory Board performed a survey of what is needed in our communities and it showed that this is one of the things that our community is in dire need of. She stated that we need to start with the young people so we can address these problems before they are arrested.

Lieutenant Ward said once Sentara took over the hospital they have put together their own team for evaluation and since that point a large percentage of those petitions that are being issued by emergency room physicians are being rescinded. They are no longer meeting the criteria for inpatient treatment and therefore they are being referred to outpatient treatment, which is where we are running into the problem with availability of outpatient treatment.

Lieutenant Ward said what we are running into is people with mental illness issues are creating a disturbance where they shouldn't be and law enforcement are not applying their CIT training and the individuals are being arrested for minor infractions, such as secondary trespass. He said if they are convicted, at the very most, they will get ten days of active sentence or six months of unsupervised probation. Instead, Mobile Crisis should be called for the individuals or they should be taken to the hospital for further evaluation. He said the key to Mobile Crisis is the patient has to be willing to talk to them. Mr. Baker said if Mobile Crisis is called during these types of circumstances they can intervene and possibly divert them from the hospital and link them to a provider. He said Mobile Crisis then follows up on the patient afterwards.

Mr. Baker agreed that we need more resources in the community such as more mental health providers. He said we also need additional beds. He said that Mobile Crisis is a service that is beginning to be utilized more. Mental Health issues is not a problem that is going to be fixed overnight and it is going to take all of our efforts. He said we need to continue utilizing resources that we already have such as utilizing Mobile Crisis more and more and continue to utilize the CIT training. He said he will take the Board's concerns back to Trillium.

Commissioner Dixon stated that Sentara Albemarle Medical Center has hired someone to specifically deal with the mental health issue. He said he will find out her name and let Mrs. Cox know.

Commissioner Perry said he would like to add a minority from the community to this committee because it is important that we hear that side of it.

At the absence of further business, the work session was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

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CHAIRMAN

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CLERK