

Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS

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September 2, 2014

Mr. Pedro Nava, Chairman
Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: NAMI CA COMMENTS ON STATUS AND OVERSIGHT OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
ACT (MHSA) FUNDS**

Dear Mr. Nava:

On behalf of NAMI California, I want to thank you for holding a Little Hoover Commission hearing on the oversight and effective use of MHSA funds. We are intimately involved in the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission and are beneficiaries of MHSA funds, so this issue is extremely important to the vitality of our organization and the health of our membership.

NAMI California is the state affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. We are the state's grassroots voice on mental illness. Our 19,000 members and 67 affiliates include many people with serious mental illness, their families and supporters. NAMI California advocates on their behalf, providing education and support to its members and the broader community.

NAMI California advocates for lives of quality and respect, without discrimination and stigma, for all our constituents. We provide leadership in advocacy, legislation, policy development, education and support throughout California.

NAMI California Advocacy provides a key voice for state and federal public and private-sector policies that facilitate research, end discrimination, reduce barriers to successful life in the community and promote timely, comprehensive and effective mental health services and supports.

NAMI California's educational programs provide critical education to help individuals and family members gain knowledge and skills for living successfully with mental illness. Our support groups are provided through many affiliates and offer invaluable connections with peers and family members who understand the challenges and joys of living with mental illness.

The creators of MHSA did not intend for it to be the sole funding source for county mental health services. The intent of the Act was to provide additional funding to expand needed services, not to supplant existing programs. Therefore, these funds are more important than ever.

The programs funded represent a wide spectrum of services – from prevention and early intervention to supportive housing to in-home care. MHSA programs have served hundreds of thousands of Californians over the past ten years and are available to those diagnosed with a chronic and persistent mental illness, serious emotional disturbance, and their families. These programs have reduced hospitalization, homelessness, suicide, and incarcerations, reaching children, youth, transitional age youth (16-25), adults, older adults, veterans and their family members. Programs funded through the MHSA help people achieve recovery and obtain meaningful places in society.

Each county's spending trends for MHSA programs and services are laid out in our NAMI California MHSA Funded Programs Report. It was created to not only house all information on MHSA funded programing, it is also a tool for local advocates to hold their counties accountable.

NAMI California believes that because MHSA was voted on as a **state-wide** proposition, oversight and evaluation at the state-level should be of the utmost importance. However, with the dissolution of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) most of these powers were stripped and delivered to the counties with little to no oversight. Therefore, NAMI California supports and recommends giving a **state-wide** agency more direct oversight over the use of MHSA funds. Our clients and families have to advocate on a county-by-county basis for the appropriate use of MHSA funds. While the appropriate use of these funds varies by county, the current approach is ineffective at providing an opportunity for individuals to advocate for county programs and plans with confidence that their input will be considered in final decision making. The heart of MHSA is “client and family driven;” however, if a county is not adhering to the vision of MHSA there is no **state-wide** oversight body that has authority of county MHSA funding distribution that would be able to oversee the process. In fact, the counties providing services are the ones who are creating them, and if someone has a problem they have to attempt to go to those in power which will more than likely result in status quo. Giving a **state-wide** agency the authority to approve, oversee and fund county plans and programs would provide an extra layer of review that is necessary for effective oversight. We believe that the accountability at the **state level** will provide improved guidance to counties and create better outcomes for consumers.

Further, counties must provide a state-entity with data on their implemented programs so they can be evaluated appropriately. As a **state-wide** initiative, it is imperative that evaluation of ALL MHSA programs is done by an unbiased entity that can provide California tax payers with information on the effectiveness of programs as it relates to the Act.

Finally, within the Acts regulations Counties were to fund State-wide programs for 4-years. This mandate of funding has come to an end; and even though state-wide evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs shows success, most counties are not voluntarily continuing to fund them at a state level. Therefore, NAMI California believes that in order to have the biggest **state-wide** impact, counties should be mandated to continue to support state-wide programs with a percentage of their MHSA funds in order to maintain consistency in a statewide approach. The MHSOAC should adopt regulations requiring this funding be continued.



In conclusion, NAMI California believes that since the passage of Proposition 63 wellness and recovery has increased. However, there is still more to be done. We cannot rely solely on MHSA funding to bridge the gaps in services. But, with more oversight and better partnerships between state and local agencies, we can provide individuals and families affected by mental illness with the best possible services and support throughout the state of California.

If you have any questions please contact me at Jessica@namica.org or (916) 567-0163.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Cruz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
Executive Director
NAMI California