

September 6, 2022

Mr. Michael Humphreys & Dr. Dale Adair

Behavioral Health Commission

Harrisburg, PA

Behavioral Health Commission Co-Chairs:

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on the Behavioral Health needs from the perspective of a provider operating services in rural counties. I do plan to attend the hearing on Thursday September 8, 2022 at the CPI location. Below is information for the testimony I would like to present on Thursday:

- Staffing continues to be an ongoing concern. In April of this year, we increased our hourly rates to assist with recruitment and used one time dollars we received for several bonuses to help with retention. Potential staff are controlling the hiring process and are looking for positions with either a hybrid option or working from home full-time. Therefore, making it difficult to find staff to work in site-based or mobile programs. We do offer a tuition reimbursement program and currently looking into loan forgiveness programs.
- Transportation in rural areas is very difficult and is not a billable service. Public transportation in many of our areas of service doesn't exist. Transporting people to our site based programs is a challenge and is done at our expense. If this was a reimbursable service, more individuals could be served.
- Currently we provide Peer Support services in 3 counties. We have 6 Certified Peer Support (CPS) staff working with 74 individuals. In addition, we have 3 staff who are certified but working in our site based programs. Therefore, we have a total of 9 CPS staff. Six are working full-time and 3 are working part-time. Peer support is a beneficial service for people with a mental illness. However, this program requires more oversight and supervision of the staff than our other licensed programs. Our reimbursements rates fluctuate depending on the MCO contract rates we receive for the service.
- Establishing set rates would be ideal for providers in rural counties. Currently, we are working with the same MCO but 3 different contracts with different rates for the same service. The costs are the same regardless of the county we are providing the service. In

addition, the rates are not evenly distributed across providers who provide the same service in the same county and/or MCO contract. Due to these discrepancies in the rates, providers are reluctant to provide services in these counties who have a need for the services. Ultimately, the people who need the service suffer.

- We recently hired a RN Manager with a psychiatric background to assist staff on advocating for psychiatric services for the people we support who are dually diagnosed (MH/ID) and live in our community homes. We have found that psychiatric providers will not listen to our staff when reporting changes and rarely will entertain a medication change. This has resulted in several inpatient stays that could have potentially been avoided.

Again, thank you for allowing Skills to provide testimony. I would be happy to answer questions.

Sincerely,

Val Barner

President/CEO

Skills of Central PA