

December 8, 2008

The fourth and final meeting of the Joint Subcommittee to Study Strategies and Models of Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 77 (2008) was held on December 8, 2008, at the General Assembly Building in Richmond. Following opening remarks by Senator Hanger, the work of the joint subcommittee was commenced.

Substance Abuse Services Council

Ms. Patty Gilbertson, Chair of the Substance Abuse Services Council, addressed the subcommittee regarding the work of the Council and suggestions for further action. Ms. Gilbertson described the composition of the Council and the agencies that participate on the Council, the purpose of the Council and past actions of the Council. She then stated that the Council supported the continuation of the SJR 77 joint subcommittee. Ms. Gilbertson highlighted the impact of abuse and misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs on the Commonwealth, the importance of funding and promoting prevention services, substance abuse risks and problems among older Virginians, and the importance of drug courts in addressing substance abuse problems. Ms. Gilbertson concluded by encouraging the joint subcommittee to explore these issues, and expressing the willingness of the Substance Abuse Services Council to work together with the joint subcommittee.

Perinatal Substance Abuse

Ms. Martha Kurgens described the extent and nature of perinatal substance abuse problems in the Commonwealth. She stated that over 12,000 infants are exposed to alcohol, over 6,000 are exposed to prescription medications taken for other than medical reasons, and over 4,500 infants are exposed to illicit drugs prior to birth in the Commonwealth each year. Ms. Kurgan explained that substance exposed newborns are at higher risk for premature delivery, low birth weight, neurological and congenital problems, increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, developmental delays, neglect or abuse, and mental health or substance abuse problems as they age. She stated that state general fund expenditures related to perinatal substance abuse totaled \$1.4 million, with an additional \$774,000 in Medicaid expenses. Ms. Kurgens also described the characteristics of substance abusing pregnant women, the challenges associated with treating substance abusing pregnant women, and some options for improving the treatment of substance abusing pregnant women.

Substance Abuse and Addiction Recovery Alliance

Mr. Mark Blackwell, Executive Director, Substance Abuse and Addiction Recovery Alliance (SAARA) Virginia, explained the purpose and goals of SAARA, a treatment option that utilizes peer counseling and members of the recovery community in providing services. Mr. Blackwell then offered two recommendations for legislation. The first option called for a \$.04 increase in the beer and wine excise tax, and use of funds collected to support substance abuse services. The second proposal called for creation of a Substance Abuse Services Trust Fund, funded with \$18 million projected to be earned through new ABC stores in the Commonwealth, and Sunday openings of ABS stores in the Commonwealth.

Recommendations of the Joint Subcommittee:

The meeting concluded with a discussion of potential recommendations of the joint subcommittee. Recommendations approved by the joint subcommittee included:

- DMHMRSAS should identify evidence based practices and work with substance abuse services providers to implement evidence based practices throughout the Commonwealth, and should take steps to provide training to local providers regarding implementation and ongoing evaluation of evidence based practices.
- DMHMRSAS should consider establishing fiscal incentives to encourage local providers to implement evidence based practices.
- Criminal justice programs that receive public funding should employ evidence based practices and to be able to demonstrate positive outcomes.
- DOC and DJJ should collect and analyze client specific outcome data on inmates who participate in substance abuse services at state facilities and provide necessary resources to support data collection and analysis.
- DMHMRSAS should collect and analyze accurate client outcomes data from community services boards, to determine the needs of the Department and the community services boards.
- The Commonwealth should mandate a school-based survey of adolescents to collect data on substance use and abuse.
- DOC, DJJ, and DCJS should adequately provide offenders under their agencies' responsibility with substance abuse screenings and, when necessary, assessments in order to identify inmates requiring substance abuse treatment.
- DOC, DJJ, and DCJS should enter into standardized contractual agreements with third party providers of substance abuse services that will hold providers accountable for quality of services provided, including requirements for reporting on clients' progress and timeliness of providing services.
- DMHMRSAS should, together with local community services boards, to develop a training curriculum or tool for judges that would address the effects of substance abuse, the benefits of training, and the treatment options available in the locality.
- Funding for drug treatment courts in the Commonwealth should be maintained, and legislation establishing drug treatment courts in Franklin and Tazewell counties should be supported.
- The Commonwealth should explore options for maximizing the role of Recovery Community Organizations in substance abuse treatment.
- DMHMRSAS should work together with community services boards to implement medication assisted treatment options.

The joint subcommittee recognized that many of these recommendations would require funding and that budget amendments might be necessary to support the recommended actions.

The joint subcommittee also recommended that the study be continued for an additional year, to allow for further exploration of the issues and development of more comprehensive recommendations.