

**Presentation to Committee Studying Treatment
Options for Offenders with Mental Illness or
Substance Abuse Disorders
(SJR 97/HJR 142)**

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Status of Funding for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment Services for Offenders

Funding Issues:

We recognize the reality of the Commonwealth's fiscal challenges, and that lower than expected general fund revenues limit increases in resources.

Given these limits, it is more critical now than in prior years to carefully assess, balance, prioritize and evaluate services to meet the many tiered treatment needs of offenders.

Need to recognize, adapt, and maintain flexibility in allocating resources and delivering services.

Multiple needs compete for resources, both in institutions and communities:

- 1. We have to maintain security and supervision – public safety is our first priority.**
- 2. Multiple program needs:**
 - Mental health treatment**
 - Substance abuse treatment**
 - Sex offender treatment**
 - Education**
 - Job skills**
 - Weak social skills**
 - Families in crisis**
 - Family abuse**
 - Transitional Services**
 - Educational disabilities**
 - Emotional disabilities**
 - Mental retardation**

Budget actions this past Session:

- **SABRE funding, providing substance abuse services in the community, was eliminated:**
 1. **\$4.4 million per year from the Department of Corrections**
 2. **\$2.3 million per year from the Department of Juvenile Justice**
 3. **\$2.5 million per year from the Department of Criminal Justice Services (awarded as part of the Community Corrections program)**

Additional reductions made that will impact substance abuse treatment and mental health services in the communities include (annual amounts shown):

- **VJCCCA – reduction of \$15 million per year (from \$29.5 to \$14.5 million per year)**
- **Removing IDEA funds, which included \$2.6 million for Drug Courts, \$700,000 for jail treatment grants, and \$114,000 for SABRE program evaluations**

(At the veto session, the General Assembly, at Governor Warner's request, used general funds to restore approximately 80% of drug court funding for FY03)

- **Closing of Department of Corrections day reporting centers in FY2004 (\$900,000)**
- **Other juvenile programs – Richmond Continuum (\$780,000), Norfolk and Portsmouth Marine Institutes (\$1 million)**

Additional funding could allow drug courts to continue, but there are other, associated costs that would be needed.

- **The jobs of substance abuse specialists, funded under SABRE, who worked with drug courts, were abolished when the funding ended.**

- **Day Reporting Centers, which provide programming and supervision for many of these offenders, are being closed in FY04 as part of the budget reductions.**

VJCCCA reductions remove much of the capacity for localities to provide treatment services to juvenile offenders.

- **Issue will be whether this will increase commitments to juvenile detention, or commitments to the state, where judges feel treatment is required but not otherwise available.**
- **May be an impact on funding under the Comprehensive Services Act, where juveniles who cannot otherwise be served under VJCCCA are moved to that program.**

Grant Funded Programs:

- **For the past several years, a number of treatment programs have been funded through federal grants, which end after 1-4 years.**
- **When these federal funds are no longer available, the programs can only continue if replacement funding is provided.**

Priorities and Goals

As noted in SJR 440 report, individuals may be placed in the criminal justice system when treatment is the primary need, not sanctions.

For some, criminal justice system placement is needed, but with a strong additional requirement for treatment.

How can we better identify and address the needs of those for whom intervention and early treatment might prevent entry or further penetration into the criminal justice system?

The focus tends to fall on the most visible cases (i.e. – those already locked up in jails, prisons, detention, and juvenile correctional centers), but there is a long list of those waiting in the wings to enter the same cycle.

We try to keep in mind the fact that we are studying treatment needs for offenders, but that preventing someone from reaching that level saves the most in resources and pain.

- **Those that we can help in that ‘before’ stage never make it into our statistics, but we save more by addressing needs early on.**

Our challenge is to use the resource that we have to provide services to address the most critical needs.

We will do that. We will identify the needs, prioritize them, allocate and manage resources to address them, and evaluate the services delivered.

We believe in research-based solutions, but also feel the need to consider what intuition indicates may work.

Those with the greatest needs for treatment absorb a disproportionate share of resources.

- **How do we balance the needs of those with the most acute care needs vs. those with lower level needs (some number of which may escalate to higher needs)?**

Screening and assessment of offenders for substance abuse is still required by the Code.

- **Allows us to continue to identify those who require services, and to prioritize needs.**
- **But resources for providing those offenders with treatment have been reduced considerably.**

(A number of individuals hired to complete the mandated screenings and assessments are funded through federal grants, which are scheduled to expire at the end of FY03.)

Program evaluation, critical to the process of defining appropriate treatment methods, is difficult to accomplish when programs are unstable.

- **The best treatment in an institution may not measure well if transitional and community services are not provided to sustain the benefits when the offender returns to his home.**
- **It is difficult to evaluate a program's success if the scope of the program is reduced (or eliminated).**

In Summary:

We face many obstacles.

However, we must learn to improve our abilities to assess, prioritize and evaluate so that we can do the most good with what we have available to us.

When additional resources are provided, we will be better positioned to expand programming quickly.