Oregon
Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

Department of Human Services
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Dear stakeholders:

My letter regarding the Department of Human Services (DHS) budget and the legislative session sparked a series of e-mails regarding funding for an Office of Consumer Affairs entitled, "Why Zero?" In response to those emails I would like to explain that my original letter was regarding Addictions and Mental Health Division's (AMH's) base budget from 2007-2009 versus proposed cuts for 2009-2011. In that comparison, the programs and services that directly support people with addictions or mental illness came out pretty well. The only direct program cuts were to supported employment and Strengthening Families, an addictions prevention program. This is a much more positive result than we had expected at the beginning of session when we were facing significant cuts to all program areas within the AMH budget because of large revenue reductions.

I would also like to be clear that we know that the budget does not meet the needs of Oregonians. The Agency Request Budget (ARB) that DHS provided to the Governor last summer reflects the investments we believe Oregon needs to make in the addictions and mental health system. The ARB was developed with significant consumer and stakeholder input. The ARB included funding an Office of Consumer Affairs, an ombudsman and additional community services.

AMH has supported restoration of the Office of Consumer Affairs every budget cycle since the program was cut in the last round of budget cuts in 2003. AMH fully supports this concept and we will continue to do so. It is unfortunate that the proposal has not made it through the next steps of the process. But the decision not to fund this program has not been made by AMH. Others in the process have not made this a priority.

Even without additional financial resources from the Legislature, AMH is prioritizing peer-delivered services. In a recent internal planning session with my management team, we included a major focus on peer-delivered services. We will be looking at ways to support peer-run programs and increase reimbursement for these programs. As we more fully develop our plan, I will share it with you.

AMH wants to work with the consumer movement to obtain the necessary support from key legislators, the Governor, stakeholders and other advocates in championing a new Office of Consumer Affairs. Without champions in the legislature and the Governor, the possibility of getting this program restored is doubtful. AMH cannot be the sole "official" entity advocating for this concept. I look forward to working you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Harris
Interim Assistant Director

RLH/jzh