

News Alert
April, 2005

Board and Care Reform

Senate Bill 258 – Chesbro (D-Acadia)

Although the Mental Health Services Act's State and local implementation is preoccupying our time, other pressing problems and people in California's mental health system can not be forgotten.

The California Network of Mental Health Clients (CNMHC) is sponsoring Senate Bill 258 to begin the effort of reforming the Board and Care homes in California.

Why we need the bill- The fact that many, many board and cares in California are in substandard condition is no secret. Go before a room of any group of mental health stakeholders and whether they are consumers, family members, or providers, all would agree that the board and care system is in need of improvement. Adult residential care facilities are only inspected once every two years except in cases of complaint. Licensing personnel are often reliant on resident or family complaints, yet both residents and families are reluctant to file complaints for fear of retaliation. Even when investigations are conducted, current standards are vague and enforcement around the state is inconsistent. Board and care reform is long overdue in California. It has been left behind in the forward march of California toward system transformation. Every day thousands of persons who may be among the most vulnerable in the mental health system are routinely subject to a system which invites abuse.

What the bill does- Senate Bill 258 basically asks the question can we do better. The bill will establish an inclusive work group of stakeholders to make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature regarding all of the following: (1) Improvements to minimum training requirements for facility operators and staff. (2) Improvements to minimal nutritional standards for food provided in facilities. (3) Improvements to facility reporting requirements. (4) Requirements for providing advocates, residents, and family members, where appropriate, access to licensing reports relative to quality of care and service provided by a facility. (5) Requirements for the posting of client rights' and a complaint process in each facility. (6) Development of standardized agreements between a facility and a resident that describe the rights and responsibilities of residents and the operator. (7) Improvements to licensing oversight including increased and random facility visits and standardized penalty structure for licensing violations. (8) The removal of barriers to the maintenance of a stable, quality, residential care facility. (9) Provision of information and support services to a resident who is displaced or who desires to move to more independent housing.

Goal of the bill - It is time look at the endemic problems in board and care homes. Through the formation of this study group under the supervision of the State Department of Mental Health, stakeholders will work collaboratively to develop recommendations for

improving the quality of residential care for adults with mental illness. We already know that we can and must do better - this bill will show us how. It is a modest beginning to improving the quality of life of people with mental disabilities who live in board and care homes.

What You Can Do

Senate Bill 258 will be heard in the Human Services Committee on April 12. The Committee convenes at 1:30 PM at Room 3191 in the Capitol Building, Sacramento. This is the bill's first Committee hearing in its legislative process.

Support letters should be sent to: Senator Joe Simitian
Chair, Human Services Committee
The Capitol
Room 2195
Sacramento, CA 94518

At this late date, you may need to fax: (916) 323-4529 or e-mail:
senatorsimitian@sen.ca.gov your comments.

“ the acceptable level of care is frustratingly minimal”

County Patient Rights Advocate

“I try not to rock the boat and put up with it all, but it's hard, hard ,hard”

Betty , 52 , long time board and care resident

“You don't complain because when you are treated like you are worthless you really begin to feel worthless”

Bill ,51 former board and care resident

The above are taken from 'Is Anybody Home', prepared by Dave Hosseini, as part of the California Network of Mental Health Clients Board and Care Project . If you would like to receive the full report which includes comments by many more residents and former residents , family members ,and other stakeholders please contact the California Network of Mental Health Clients at 916-443-3232