



Gibbons Capitol Report
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Reforming Missouri's Mental Health System

The horrible fire that took the lives of 10 people at a privately run group is yet another tragedy to strike our state's most vulnerable citizens. A series of articles published earlier this year shined light on an alarming number of deaths and injuries caused by abuse and neglect in both state-run and private care facilities. Last week I shared some of my goals for the 2007 Legislative session. On that list is reforming Missouri's mental health system.

Public-Private Partnerships

While spending more money is part of the equation, it will not guarantee the safety and best quality of life for people with development disabilities and mental illness. Our economy is on the move now, but when our state faced recession for several years, budget cuts were made and different forms of funding for mental health services were sought. Staffing cuts at Missouri Western Mental Health Center in Kansas City led to a decision to close a 25-bed unit there. But instead of letting the space remain vacant, the center leased the unit to neighboring Truman Medical Center for its psychiatric patients. The partnership has been a success. By working together, the two institutions have been able to do what is best for those who need psychiatric care in the region.

Working with Federally Qualified Health Centers

The Department of Mental Health recently received a \$14 million, five-year transformation grant from the federal government. The funds will help support the strategic planning, workforce development and technological enhancements required to transform Missouri's public mental health delivery system into one that is more patient-oriented, efficient and cost-effective. The grant also affords the department a rare opportunity to apply clinical practices based on real evidence and to encourage collaboration and integration with federally qualified health centers. The result should be greater availability of services, shorter wait lists and a more holistic, less fragmented and better coordinated system of care.

Doing More with Less

Finding ways to do more with existing funds is a key to true reform of our state's mental health delivery system. We will draw on our history of successfully reforming our state's mental health system for children. The goal is to create a new mental health care delivery

system that is better for the people of Missouri. As lawmakers, we will be closely involved in the reform process and will keep these principles in mind. First, the department needs to shift its emphasis from disability to recovery. Dollars must follow the client. And lastly, we must keep track of outcomes, watch the clinical data and not be afraid to change how the Department of Mental Health operates. It should embrace opportunities to form partnerships with the private sector, as it did in Kansas City, to find solutions to challenges facing the department.

We must reform our state's mental health system. In doing so, we will be doing what is best for our most vulnerable citizens. Their safety and quality of life is what is most important.