



December 11, 2018

Governor Roy Cooper
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-0301

Re: 2019 Funding to Enhance Mental Health Services in Prison

Dear Governor Cooper,

We are a coalition of mental health advocacy organizations that has been working collaboratively with Department of Public Safety leadership since 2011 to improve the identification and treatment of prisoners with mental disabilities. Our coalition came together after the tragic death of an inmate due to lithium toxicity in the old mental health ward at Central Prison. Since 2011, there have been meaningful improvements such as Crisis Intervention Training in prison (2012), consultations from national experts (2012, 2014), participation in the VERA Institute of Justice's Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative (2015). Significantly, in 2015 the North Carolina Legislature appropriated twelve million dollars (\$12 Million) to open eight Therapeutic Diversion Units (TDUs) and expand the capacity of Central Prison inpatient mental health services.

Unfortunately, the Legislature did not appropriate the additional \$12 Million sought by the Agency in 2015 to fund sufficient clinical staff to address the increasing mental health treatment needs of the prison population. Since 2015, the percentage of prisoners with mental illness has continued to increase. The capacity of the TDUs is inadequate to address the needs, and many prisoners with mental illness remain in restrictive housing without adequate out of cell treatment. Eight (8) inmates have committed suicide so far in 2018 – perhaps the largest number ever. In one week in August 2018, three (3) inmates attempted suicide at Bertie Correctional Institution; only Mr. Howlett was successful.

Based on national data, it is likely that more than a thousand inmates with an Intellectual and Developmental Disability lack appropriate Day Treatment as outlined in NC DPS Health Care Policy and Procedure Manual, Behavioral Day Treatment, TX 1-6, as there is only one Day Treatment Program operating at this time.

As you know, 95% of North Carolina prisoners will be returning to our communities. There is an urgent need to address treatment and habilitation needs while people are in prison; preparation for their release can prevent recidivism. We urge you to seek at least the \$12 Million unfunded in 2015 to enhance the mental health services in our prisons. Since 2011, North Carolina's courage to address the mental health treatment needs of prisoners has won national praise and

Roy Cooper
Page 2
12/11/2018

recognition. We urge you to continue the progress and seek additional funding in the 2019 Legislative Session.

We look forward to supporting increased funding for mental health treatment in the prison and to working collaboratively with you and DPS leadership.



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Cc: Erik A. Hooks, Secretary, North Carolina Department of Public Safety