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Mental Health America of Wisconsin: Moving in the right direction

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May 15, 2017; Madison. Mental Health America of Wisconsin urges the Joint Finance Committee to support the Governor's recommendations to fund a youth crisis stabilization facility and a veteran's peer run respite. These items will be among the Department of Health Services, Division of Care and Treatment Services budget items that the Committee will review tomorrow.

Simply put these two items continue the Governor and Legislature's track record of moving in the right direction with regard to mental health services and supports: from more costly and restrictive institutional services to more flexible and less traumatizing community-based alternatives.

Currently, due to the lack of alternatives, many youth in crisis are admitted to Winnebago Mental Health Institute at significant cost. While the current budget initiative would only begin funding this alternative type of facility it will set in motion a systems change that can lead to the development of a number of regional facilities. This will be preferable to the current system which results in youth being taken far from their homes for a short-term placement. Importantly the crisis stabilization facilities would not require youth to be removed under child welfare statutes in order to get the care they need, a problem with the current system. MHA supports funding recommendations that would allow DHS to spend up to the authorized amount of funds but allow them to begin charging counties earlier in the process. We do not support changing funding to a one-time allocation as this makes

it impossible for DHS to undertake a contract. We are concerned about requiring DHS to fund more than one location
initially unless additional funds are allocated. We think it is preferable to pilot this, learn from the experience and then look to expand sites.

Peer Run Respites (PRR) are supportive home-like environments for individuals with mental health or substance use disorders that offer self-directed care, and are run by and for individuals with lived experience of mental health and/or substance use disorders. A PRR is designed to serve as a short-term, residential option for people who are experiencing an increase in symptoms who are in need of support to aid in their recovery and hence avert further crises and to avoid hospitalization. Currently there are three PRRs in Wisconsin, which were created through Governor Walker's 2013 budget. MHA supports the use of program revenue funds to support expanding PRR to serve the veteran population in Milwaukee because expanding community capacity will reduce reliance on the state institutions. We do not support alternative 3' because there is significant start-up planning to begin a new PRR providers are likely to be unwilling to take on the risk of developing a new service if funding
is for only a year.

MHA urges the Legislature to also pass legislation that will define PRR in statutes. Through the
implementation of the initial three sites we learned that without such a definition local zoning
authorities do not know how to zone these facilities. Such language was passed in 2015 Assembly Bill 708, but this bill did not pass the Senate before the end of the session.