



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Behavioral Health and Service Integration Administration
PO Box 45050, Olympia, WA 98504-5050

September 5, 2014

Dear Legislator:

In 2013, the Legislature directed the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to undertake a number of activities related to improving the adult behavioral health services system in Washington State. Laws of 2013, ch. 338, §2, now codified at RCW 43.20A.895. This bill directed DSHS to “contract for the services of an independent consultant to review the provision of forensic mental health services in Washington State and provide recommendations as to whether and how the state’s forensic mental health system should be modified to provide an appropriate treatment environment for individuals with mental disorders who have been charged with a crime while enhancing the safety and security of the public and other patients and staff at forensic treatment facilities.” RCW 43.20A.895 (3). The Department was directed to submit a report regarding the recommendations of the independent consultant to the governor and the relevant fiscal and policy committees of the legislature by August 1, 2014.

The independent consultant contract was awarded to Groundswell Services, Inc. The consultants included Neil Gowensmith, Ph.D., Daniel Murrie, Ph.D. and Ira Packer, Ph.D., all nationally respected forensics consultants. After conducting extensive research and consulting with many stakeholders, the consultants submitted their final report to DSHS on June 30, 2014.

The consultants’ report includes detailed recommendations related to the forensic competency evaluation and restoration system. These recommendations are largely consistent with the recommendations of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee’s (JLARC) April 2014 report. <http://www.leg.wa.gov/JLARC/AuditAndStudyReports/2014/Documents/14-1.pdf> In particular, a primary JLARC recommendation was for DSHS to hire an independent, external consultant to develop a new forensic service delivery approach and staffing model. Additionally JLARC recommended that DSHS strengthen its forensic data management process. While DSHS has previously indicated its agreement with the JLARC recommendations, it has clearly stated that additional staff and resources will be required to successfully implement those recommendations. The Groundswell consultants’ report reinforces that this will be a necessity.

Additionally in their report, the consultants from Groundswell call for the establishment of a centralized Office of Forensic Mental Health Services with adequate authority and structured data-management capacity. The Groundswell report includes many other recommendations

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related to the forensic mental health system. We will be carefully reviewing each item more closely with respect to both policy and fiscal implications. Our mission of supporting individuals with mental illness in their efforts to achieve sustainable recovery, independence and wellness while protecting public safety will shape how we proceed. We look forward to further discussions with our stakeholders and legislators on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jane Beyer", with a stylized, cursive script.

Jane Beyer
Assistant Secretary