

Date: February 18, 2016

Re: AB885 and Impact on People with Disabilities and Their Families

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AB885 would require Milwaukee County to enter into an agreement with the Department of Revenue to have DOR collect the County's debt. We are concerned about the impact of this proposal on people with mental illness and their families who may be in debt to Milwaukee County because of services received at the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex.

Many low income adults and children who live in Milwaukee County have received services at the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex. Often these services are involuntary – law enforcement may bring adults and children to the Mental Health Complex for a variety of reasons.

The County bills individuals who have received service at the Mental Health Complex emergency room (PCS) and/or received inpatient services. The burden of these costs falls on the person with mental illness who received services, often against their will, or on the families of children who were patients. Most of these individuals have very limited financial resources; many are indigent. They may be enrolled in Medicaid; however, Medicaid generally does not pay for these services because the Mental Health Complex is an IMD (some Medicaid HMOs may cover these services). They may have private insurance; however, Milwaukee County does not have agreements with most private insurance companies.

As a result, low income people with mental illness and their families are left struggling to pay for major medical expenses not covered by their insurance, and often for services that they did not seek or consent to. We have been contacted by adults who are struggling to pay these fees, as well as by parents. For example, we were contacted recently by the mother of a teen who had attempted suicide and been hospitalized. The teen was stabilized at a nearby hospital, then brought in handcuffs by police to the Complex – even though the family asked that she not be taken there and that they be allowed to connect her with outpatient services. After waiting for hours, the teen was assessed and sent home without other assistance. The family has since received a bill for well over \$1000 which is not covered by insurance and they are struggling to pay.

We ask that you slow down this process to allow further consideration of how to address the impact of this bill on low income adults and families of children who have a mental illness, and are in debt for Milwaukee County mental health services. Administrative code DHS 1 (Uniform Fee Schedule) stipulates that most governmental services have to apply financial criteria based on federal poverty levels to collect debts for service. If someone is on SSI or Medicaid for example, then it is prima facie evidence that they are indigent and unable to pay for services, so the fee is required to be waived. For others that may have an ability to pay, then the monthly amount is determined according to the administrative code minus court-ordered obligations to determine the amount (if any) of the monthly fee. The proposed bill seems to be in conflict with this code.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.

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