



EXHIBIT NO. B

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**COALITION FOR MENTALLY DISABLED
CITIZENS OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA**

100 North Washington Street, Suite 234, Falls Church, Virginia 22046

**TESTIMONY ON THE PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2003 BUDGET
FOR THE ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL
APRIL 8TH, 2002**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jeannie Cummins, and I am the Chairwoman of the Coalition for Mentally Disabled Citizens of Northern Virginia. We represent over sixty human service organizations and hundreds of advocates dedicated to reducing the unmet need for quality community-based services for individuals with mental illness, mental retardation and substance additions.

Addressing the needs of individuals with mental disabilities is always a finely tuned balancing act requiring financial support at the local, state, and federal levels. When the economy goes south and disasters strike, this becomes an even tougher challenge, as dollars get scarcer and needs grow larger. The Coalition fought the good fight at the General Assembly this year, and managed to protect most existing resources that fund community services for people with mental illness, mental retardation and substance dependence. However, we gained no new funds to reduce growing waiting lists for these services, or to remedy inadequate payment rates for services that impact worker retention and service quality. Moreover, the state practically gutted substance abuse treatment programs in the criminal justice system at the eleventh hour to make up for the budget shortfall. Therefore, we come to you today to request your assistance to ensure services for people with mental disabilities in Alexandria simply "stay afloat" for another year by taking three actions.

MAKE WAVES VIRGINIA!

First, we ask you to utilize a portion of any funds the Council sets aside for programs that have lost state money to support substance abuse treatment in the jail system. Individuals who have substance addiction problems can overcome their disease with proper treatment, education, support, and connections to services. However, without such intervention, people relapse and find themselves in jail again. Funding to plug the hole in the SABRE program will prevent this revolving door phenomenon and prevent our City from spending millions of dollars to address the costs of untreated addictions, which are involved in the majority of fatal accidents, murders, rapes, domestic abuse and child abuse. For every \$1.00 spent on treatment, we can save \$7.00 - \$8.00 and improve the quality of everyone's lives.

Second, we urge you to dedicate funding to support the vocational and day support services our special education graduates will need to ensure a smooth transition from school to work and independent living. Vocational services are essentially an extension of the support these students have received from the school system to help enhance their skills, bolster their productivity and involvement in the community. These services also allow parents to continue working and supporting their households, instead of quitting jobs to provide daily support to an adult family member with a disability. This June, there are six special education graduates who need vocational services but cannot access other funding sources. Please do not squander the investment we have made in these students during their school years and watch their skills deteriorate to the point of needing more restrictive, costly care. Instead, put dollars in place to ensure these young adults become active, vibrant, contributing members of our community.

Third, we request that the Council adopt the supplemental budget request to increase on-call pay for counselors who perform overnight shift work at the City's five residential facilities. Currently, workers do not receive compensation for any "sleeping hours" on the job. The lack of any reimbursement for simply being present to handle nighttime emergencies is a significant disincentive for employees, and has become a major staff recruitment and retention problem. Inadequate overnight staffing for residential programs that serve people with complex medical, behavioral, and psychological care needs is a disaster waiting to happen. Our City cannot afford to be in the news, for example, for a person who dies of seizure-related complications during the night because of insufficient staffing. Please support the proposed plan to pay these workers for two hours of their "sleep time" per night, as a strategy to hire and keep well-trained support staff.

The Coalition also stands behind the supplemental budget request to fund a HIPAA/Corporate Compliance Officer, as we believe this position is essential to keeping our programs in compliance so we minimize violations, assure rights protections, maximize revenue streams through compliance with regulations, and avoid spending time and resources on complaints.

We strongly support the City Manager's efforts to maintain services at current levels. We hope, however, you will consider these other pressing needs. Your support will help ensure Alexandria citizens with mental disabilities lead full, productive lives.