

4-4-05

**City Council Public Hearing on the FY06 Budget -April 4, 2005  
Comments of Mary Riley, Chair, Community Services Board**

Mr. Mayor, Council members. I'm speaking today on behalf of the Community Services Board, which oversees the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse. I want to thank you for your support of Alexandria's citizens who struggle with disabilities and ask that you continue your support of the Department in your budget deliberations.

We've all read the newspaper accounts of problems in Virginia's assisted living homes and been concerned for the residents of these programs. As you know, our Board oversees 63 residential sites, including 10 group homes. The consumers we serve are aging and developing increasingly severe medical and other needs with each passing year.

In response to these needs, the Manager's budget proposes funding for awake overnight staff at one of our facilities for fragile, high-risk persons with mental illness, as well as nursing and other additional staffing to upgrade supervision in our residential program. The proposed budget also contains funding for vocational and day support services for youth with mental retardation.

While this funding will provide significant help for our consumers, there are still unmet needs, the most pressing of which is case management services for many of our substance abuse outpatient consumers. Case managers provide many services. They help people apply for entitlements such as Medicaid and Social Security. They help consumers obtain emergency and permanent housing, get to medical appointments and obtain medications, or get food when they are unable to afford it.

Many consumers are too disabled to independently access these necessities on their own and require the assistance of a case manager. The lack of critical case management services puts these consumers, who have taken the first steps necessary to overcome their addictions, at risk of relapse, homelessness, hospitalization and incarceration.

We understand the pressure Council is under to lower property taxes and cut expenses and we would not be asking for your consideration on this matter if we didn't believe it to be a critical need. We feel that our first priority must be to preserve the funds in the Manager's budget, but we would greatly appreciate Council taking a hard look at funding this position (about \$62,000) so that more high-risk individuals can receive the services they need to help them in their recovery and in living independent lives.

You should also be aware that additional budget issues could surface within the next year due to changes in State regulations for assisted living facilities and potential changes in federal Medicaid regulations. The Board is monitoring these changes closely.

Again, thank you for your continued support of the Community Services Board and the consumers we serve, and thank you in advance for your support of the Department funding in the Manager's budget, as well as your consideration of the case management position.