


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 12, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL RETARDATION, AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES TO ENHANCE EXISTING MENTAL HEALTH JAIL DIVERSION EFFORTS WITHIN THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application to the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) to enhance existing mental health jail diversion efforts within the City of Alexandria.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Authorize the Alexandria Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse to submit a grant application for \$443,511 to the State DMHMRSAS for expansion of the City's jail diversion initiatives (the grant application has actually been submitted contingent on Council approval, since notification of the opportunity came too late for prior Council approval); and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: Due in large part to its history of providing jail diversion activities, the State DMHMRSAS has selected Alexandria as one of thirteen localities eligible to apply for funding for jail diversion programs. The Department was notified of the availability of grant funds on October 23, 2008, and the grant application is due on November 17, 2008.

Jail diversion programs are aimed at decreasing crime and recidivism by ensuring that timely, appropriate and individualized services are available to persons with serious mental illness. The programs are not intended to hold persons harmless for committing crimes; rather, they are aimed at intervening early and appropriately so that mentally ill persons receive appropriate and coordinated treatment and do not offend or re-offend.

There are a number of jail diversion initiatives currently operating in the City:

- The MHMRSA Detoxification Unit, which serves as a “drop off” site for Alexandria police officers to bring persons detained for public intoxication, diverts approximately 150 persons away from incarceration each year and offers them an opportunity to engage in substance abuse treatment.
- The Alexandria Public Defender’s Office recently began the Alexandria Jericho Project. The program is a post-booking jail diversion program, the goal of which is to develop treatment plans for seriously mentally ill clients who have been charged with crimes and who, with appropriate community-based treatment, can live productive, law-abiding lives. These plans are then submitted to judges as sentencing alternatives. The program began in August and is expected to serve approximately 40 persons each year.
- MHMRSA staff helps over 150 mentally ill and substance-using inmates identify and receive “re-entry” services (e.g., Medicaid, social security, mental health and substance abuse services, etc.) as they leave the Alexandria Detention Center and transition back into the community. In addition, the Detention Center recently opened a “Re-Entry” Unit, which serves inmates who are scheduled for release within six months. It provides a variety of classes and training aimed at helping them successfully reintegrate into the community.

This grant is intended to build upon these initiatives. The Alexandria Community Services Board and the Alexandria Community Criminal Justice Board have reviewed the grant proposal and support its submission.

Funding will be requested for the following purposes:

- To provide Crisis Intervention Team training for a number of Alexandria Police Officers and Dispatchers, so that they can better interact with persons with mental illness, and help prevent inappropriate incarceration of individuals with mental illness.
- To purchase services to support individualized treatment for mentally ill offenders who are making the transition from incarceration back to the community.
- To fund an Adult Probation and Parole Officer (a state employee) who will specialize in mental health cases; and a therapist at MHMRSA who will specialize in working with mentally ill clients involved in the criminal justice system (this person will also help coordinate this grant).
- To fund additional psychiatric coverage at MHMRSA to help provide for the rapid assessment and treatment of Jail Diversion clients.

The goal of all of these initiatives is to prevent the arrest and incarceration of persons with serious mental illness by providing early and appropriate identification, and intensive and specialized treatment and supervision.

FISCAL IMPACT: The grant proposal is for \$443,511 and no City match is required. No new City positions will be required; the therapist position in MHMRSA is vacant and has been frozen in anticipation of City and State budget reductions. It can be unfrozen if the grant is awarded.

Although various City and State agencies will provide services through this funding, MHMRSA will serve as the fiscal agent for all funds received. MHMRSA will enter into memorandums of agreement with State Probation and Parole, the Alexandria Police Department and the Alexandria Public Defender's Office to implement any services funded through the grant.

If the grant is awarded on an ongoing basis, it is unlikely that the grant amount will increase in future years. In that case, portions of the program would be reduced to match the available state grant award. The Department does not intend to seek any City funds for this initiative. If funding is eliminated, other non-City sources of funding will be pursued. If replacement funds cannot be secured, these services and staff positions will be terminated.

STAFF:

L. Michael Gilmore, Ph.D., Director, MHMRSA

Liz Wixson, LCSW, Director of Acute Care Services, MHMRSA

Jim Fleming, Fiscal Officer, MHMRSA