

LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION MEETING

OCTOBER 14, 2015

Good (Morning/Afternoon), my name is Carrie Lucas and I am representing the Circuit 20 Mental Health Supportive Housing Task Force and concerned Parents of children with mental illness.

First let me thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding the desperate need for housing for people with mental illness in this region and specifically Lee County. You may not be aware of the critical need and the lack of mental health services in the State of Florida that ranks 49th in the Nation for mental health services. We, as parents, know that the Government is a player, but not the ultimate answer to assisting us in creating housing.

This past year, the Circuit 20 Mental Health Supportive Housing Task Force was formed. We are a volunteer group to advocate and assist organizations in developing mental health supportive housing in Circuit 20 and specifically Lee County. Many of us are parents of children with mental illness who knows first-hand the difficulties in finding housing for our children. I am one of those parents who knows all too well how difficult it is to find housing for my 30 year old son who suffers from schizo-affective disorder for fourteen years. By the way, he was once a honor roll student, at the top of his class, had many friends, very athletic and had dreams and goals for his future, until the illness robbed him of his potential.

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Now, he struggles in a mental health system in the State of Florida that “I often feel” is more insanely irrational than he is.

My son was recently discharged from the State Hospital and due to his inability to care for himself, the State Hospital would only release him to a 24 hour care provider of an assisted living facility for the mentally ill or a licensed group home. You may not be aware that there is no Assisted Living Facility for the mentally ill in our community, but we were able to find only one bed open in a licensed group home in Lee County. We were one of the lucky families. Many are not so fortunate and remain in the State Hospital until supportive housing is found which could take weeks, months, or sometimes a year. This causes a backlog for others to enter the State Hospital. To put it simply, “ WE CAN’T GET THEM IN AND WE CAN’T GET THEM OUT.” License Group homes can be expensive, especially when there is very little competition. It begs the question “ How can families without financial means afford it and what do you think happens to their love one? Let me tell you, those who cannot afford it often become homeless causing a vicious cycle to start all over again: crisis intervention, hospitalization, inappropriate incarceration that has no positive end creating a financial burden for tax payers, not to mention, the hardship on the mentally ill and their families

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who often feel helpless in the face of the current lack of affordable supportive housing in our community.

There is a provider with a “shovel-ready” project to construct an additional 18 beds in Lee County. We are asking for \$900,000 from the State to construct these beds.

In closing, permanent supportive housing is an evidence based practice for preventing homelessness, hospitalization, and jail time. It is time to take the preventive cost effective approach, but more importantly, it is time to do the morally right thing! Having a safe and secure place to live is an important part of recovery, along with access to services that enables those with mental health conditions to live as independently as possible with hope and opportunity to lead a productive life.

Thank you

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CASL has currently 420 beds from Sarasota to Naples servicing those with mental illnesses and will soon have 520 by Spring next year.

They already received funds from the Continuum of Care Program (Federal Government) for housing homeless individuals in Lee County.

The program is designed to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, States, and local governments to quickly re-house homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness; promote access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Continuum of Care Program funds may be used to pay for the eligible costs used to establish and operate projects under five program components: (i) permanent housing, which includes permanent supportive housing for persons with disabilities, and rapid rehousing; (ii) transitional housing; (iii) supportive services only; (iv) Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), and (v) in some cases, homelessness prevention.

They have an ALF in Sarasota and receive individuals from both the jail and local mental health hospital.