



January 15, 2007

Thank you for allowing NAMI VA this time and also our thanks to Senator Howell for being the patron on this budget amendment.

I am Bill Farrington, the president of NAMI Virginia. We are the Virginia Affiliate of NAMI, The National Alliance on Mental Illness, which is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons living with serious mental illness and their families. We have 27 local branches throughout Virginia.

For the past three and a half years I have worked with the CSB's in the tidewater area on the Reinvestment Project, giving input on their design of a more community based mental health system utilizing funds that previously were used for acute care at Eastern State Hospital. I feel the Tidewater CSB's have made a lot of progress by reinvesting the funds more creating community services which in the long run will result in fewer people having to go to state hospitals for longer term care.

Over that time I have observed the frustration the working groups encounter when they are trying to locate appropriate housing for those with mental illness in the community. At times they have people in community hospitals needing to go to Eastern for longer term care and who can not go because there is no space. At this time Eastern has approximately 40 people (statewide approximately 150) who are ready to be discharged, but can not be for varying reasons and appropriate available housing is one of those reasons.

Each year NAMI members have developed our legislative agendas. In recent years our major issue has been housing. In all major communities within the state our consumers are faced with the same problem of limited choice, limited availability, high cost and the limitation provided in existing code on utilization of funds already available for appropriate housing

This year we invited housing experts who deal with all disabilities from state agencies, service organizations, CSB's, State Hospitals, and our membership to again talk about the issue. After much discussion the group decided the first step to improve housing availability would be to pilot a program utilizing Auxiliary Housing Grants in other than assisted living facilities or adult foster care homes.

The Auxiliary Housing Grants budget amendment we are requesting would be a pilot for 200 consumers. The consumers would be allowed to utilize the grants they are eligible for where there is not housing availability or if they would benefit from arrangements of their choice that promote more focused recovery and independence. CSB case managers shall assist consumers in choosing and accessing their housing arrangements.

Overtime the program should be evaluated to determine if consumers were provided greater access to housing which was appropriate and aided in their integration back into the community and their recovery.

We seek your approval for this budget amendment.

I would like to respond to your questions.

Thank you for your time.