

For Immediate Release

November 28, 2018



Media Contact

Rev. Alexis Anderson

(225) 281-8496

preachisliteracy@hotmail.com

Citizens Committee Recommends Capital Area Human Services District to Manage Funds and Programming if Mental Health Tax Proposal Passes

Baton Rouge, La. – The Committee to Support Equitable Healthcare for All has released a report outlining five specific concerns regarding plans for funding of the so-called Bridge Center should the upcoming mental health tax proposal that is on the December 8 ballot for East Baton Rouge Parish voters pass.

The report, entitled *“Right Goal, Wrong Delivery: An Evaluation of a Proposal to Continue a Two-Tier Health Care System in East Baton Rouge Parish”* focuses on the issues related to the mental health delivery system in East Baton Rouge Parish and whether the proposed plan - should the mental health tax pass - adequately addresses the existing issues.

The Committee has identified five specific areas as problematic with the potential tax revenues exclusively funding the so-called Bridge Center:

- The choice of provider; and
- Whether the focus of the Center is healthcare or law enforcement; and
- Whether public monies are being diverted for private interests; and
- The lack of racial and clinical diversity in the Center’s leadership and decision-makers; and
- The lack of transparency and specificity associated with the proposed plan.

The report recommends that the mental health tax, if passed, would be most effective and inclusive if managed by the local government entity designated by law to provide comprehensive behavioral health and substance abuse services: the Capital Area Human Services District.

One of the driving goals for this tax proposal was to develop tools to alleviate the ongoing mental health practices that have resulted in deaths of individuals in police custody at the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison. The nonprofit organization Promise of Justice Initiative published two earlier reports on the ongoing crisis in the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, which includes over 25 deaths between 2012 - 2016. As of November 2018, prison deaths in the facility persists and the Parish is involved in several active lawsuits, including the case of Jonathan Fano, a local man who was arrested on October 31, 2018 by East Baton Rouge Police and who reportedly suffered from mental illness. Fano was cited with six misdemeanors: obscenity, criminal trespass, disturbing the peace, resisting arrest, misdemeanor battery on an officer, and simple criminal damage to property. He was taken to the Parish Prison where he spent the 94 days - 92 of them in solitary confinement. Capital Area Human Services District has been instrumental in providing psychiatric services to the prison and in providing training to law enforcement on crisis intervention team (CIT) training.

The report points out that Capital Area Human Services is currently providing the most comprehensive wrap around programming locally that focuses on a strategic plan inclusive of screenings, detention, and early treatment. As the agency that started and managed the Mental Health Emergency Room Extension (MHERE), the report continues, there would be no unnecessary and costly learning curve for that agency to take the lead on these services going forward - not the proposed so-called Bridge Center.

###

About The Committee to Support Equitable Healthcare for All

The **Committee to Support Equitable Healthcare for All** is a group of citizens committed to insuring that mental health, like all healthcare, should be universally accessible, provide evidence based practices and provide those services without regard to race, creed, nationality, income level or gender.