

Commonwealth of Virginia Commission on Mental Health Law Reform Fact Sheet

Membership: The 26-member Commission on Mental Health Law Reform was appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia, Leroy Rountree Hassell, Sr., in October, 2006. The Commission is chaired by Professor Richard J. Bonnie, Director of the Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy at the University of Virginia. Commission members include officials from all three branches of state government as well as representatives of many private stakeholder groups, including consumers and their families, service providers, and the bar. The Commission is assisted by five task forces who will address gaps in access to services, involuntary civil commitment, consumer empowerment, special needs of children and adolescents, and intersections between the mental health and criminal justice systems.

Funding: The Commission is an initiative of the Supreme Court of Virginia and is funded by the Supreme Court. The Commission's research is supported by the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services.

Charge: The Commission will conduct a comprehensive examination of Virginia's mental health laws and services and will study ways to use the law more effectively to serve the needs of people with mental illness, while respecting the interests of their families and communities.

Goals of the study include reducing the need for commitment by improving access to mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services, reducing criminalization of people with mental illness, making the process of involuntary treatment more fair and effective, enabling consumers of mental health services to have more choice over the services they receive, and helping young people with mental health problems and their families before these problems spiral out of control.

Process: Meetings of the Commission will be held on October 12-13 (Williamsburg), December 8 (Charlottesville), March 15-16, 2007 (Charlottesville), June 21-22, 2007 (Fredericksburg), and a date to be designated in October, 2007 (Richmond).

Product: The Commission aims to complete its study and submit its final report in October, 2007. It is anticipated that legislative proposals based on the Commission's recommendations will be prepared for the 2008 session of the General Assembly.

Further Information:

Thomas M. Diggs, Commission Staff Director and Assistant Director of Judicial Programs, Supreme Court of Virginia, 804-225-3474, 804-786-4542 (fax), tmdiggs@courts.state.va.us;

Katya Herndon, Director of Legislative and Public Relations, Supreme Court of Virginia, 804-786-7595, 804-786-4542 (fax) kherndon@courts.state.va.us.

Both are at 100 North Ninth Street, Third Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219