

Exhibit No. 15Date 3-30-07Bill No. HB 820

**Testimony on HB 820**  
**Presented by Kathy McGowan**  
**On behalf of the Montana Community Mental Health Centers; the Montana**  
**Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association; and the Montana County Attorneys**  
**Association**  
**March 30, 2007**

The three organizations I represent have been working together for many months in the company of numerous other organizations and individuals that have identified community mental health as a crisis issue in our communities. For your information, I have attached copies of letters that were submitted to Governor Schweitzer, as well as graph to which I will speak to in a couple of minutes.

Our message has been loud, clear and consistent, both before the legislative session and throughout these past months with you: We are desperate for secure crisis beds in our communities; we support 72-hour presumptive eligibility for individuals in crisis; and increased funding for the Mental Health Services Plan (MHSP) is a must.

The Human Services Subcommittee heard us, they understood, and they responded, usually unanimously. Please acknowledge and support their good work and resist the amendments that strike at the heart of our state's need to do the right thing, the economic thing, and that is to support our communities in their desire to serve their mentally ill neighbors at home.

We have heard repeatedly that the State Hospital, the prison, our local emergency rooms and jails are facing grave circumstances due to swelling populations. They have become the treatment choice of first resort. Yet, you are being asked to consider amendments that will further erode our abilities to intervene and treat folks at home. To be honest, I couldn't be more flabbergasted that we are even contemplating policy decisions of this magnitude. Earlier in the session I appeared before a committee and asserted my opinion that our state seemed intent on moving toward reinstitutionalization. I got myself in a little hot water for stating that opinion, but the evidence is there.

The graph I'm including with my handout shows what happened when MHSP was cut during the 2003 budget crisis. You will notice that the census at the State Hospital almost immediately began to spike. I wish we had similar data for our jails. I expect we'd see a similar spike. At one point, when our groups were asking for increases in MHSP, we were told that it was too expensive, we couldn't afford it. Yet, we evidently can afford to jail and hospitalize.

This isn't the Dark Ages. Please support the community mental health initiatives endorsed by the Human Services Subcommittee. Please vote against the amendments that further debilitate MHSP; that undercut the drop-in centers; that delay provider rates; and prevent us from moving forward with behavioral health facilities.

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## *Sheriffs & Peace Officers Association*

November 27, 2006

Honorable Brian Schweitzer  
Governor  
State of Montana  
Capitol Station  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

The Montana Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association has identified mental health funding and issues as a top priority for the 2007 Legislative Session. You won't be surprised, we're sure, that we become first line responders when members of our communities experience mental health crises. Without the necessary resources our communities are very limited in our abilities to do the right thing at the right time.

Our members participate in the Local Advisory Councils and interact with the Service Area Authorities. We wholeheartedly agree with the SAAs and endorse the following priorities:

- Increased funding for secure crisis beds in our communities.
- 72-hour presumptive eligibility for individuals in crisis.
- Increased funding for the Mental Health Services Plan.

We add one of our own: Funding for community mental health crisis teams.

You may not realize that at one time MHSP funding levels were sufficient enough to help communities maintain the State Hospital census at a much reduced level. During the Martz Administration's years, when many cuts were instituted, MHSP was drastically reduced and you see for yourself what happened to the State Hospital census. If we don't have the proper tools in our toolbox, we can't do the right thing for our communities' residents. We understand that returning MHSP funding to some semblance of its former status did not make it into your budget, but we hope that you will be amenable to having that discussion.

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We have come under some criticism because one of our responsibilities includes transportation of our mentally ill citizens, sometimes hundreds of miles. It is not a pleasant experience either for our residents or our officers. It is our contention that the solution is recognition that treatment of mental illness is best achieved by providing treatment resources close to home, therefore limiting transportation and all the issues that go with it.

Our Association looks forward to working with you and the 2007 Legislature to achieve the goals outlined in this letter.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

SHERIFF CHERYL LIEDLE  
President



**MONTANA COUNTY ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION**  
**34 West Sixth Avenue • Suite 2E**  
**Helena, Montana 59601**

December 8, 2006

Honorable Brian Schweitzer  
Governor  
State of Montana  
Capitol Station  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

This past week at the Montana County Attorneys Association Board of Directors meeting we finalized our legislative agenda. We determined that a top priority for the 2007 Legislative Session would be mental health funding and related issues.

Mental health issues never have been easy for us. However, the last few years they have become increasingly difficult. The sharp decrease in funding for the Mental Health Services Plan under the Martz administration necessitated counties to transport more of our folks to the State Hospital. In addition, successful efforts by Senator Keenan to rewrite portions of the mental health law further hindered us.

The Local Advisory Councils and the Service Area Authorities have been meeting and planning. We wholeheartedly agree with the SAAs and endorse the following priorities:

- Increased funding for secure crisis beds in our communities.
- 72-hour presumptive eligibility for individuals in crisis.
- Increased funding for the Mental Health Services Plan.

We laud you for making mental health a priority in your budget. However, we would be interested in a dialogue around shifting the emphasis from institutional to community care.

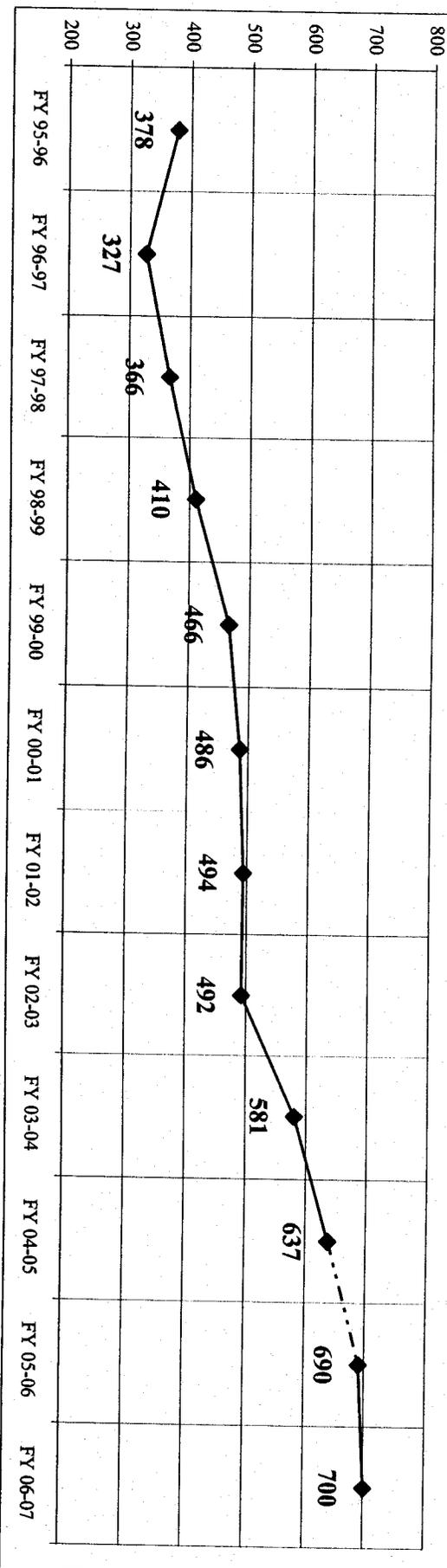
Sincerely,

MIKE WEBER  
President

# Admissions

	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	Total for Year
FY 95-96	30	39	43	32	25	33	32	30	31	21	32	30	378
FY 96-97	27	26	30	24	20	19	34	17	35	41	30	24	327
FY 97-98	25	29	31	33	20	25	31	29	30	39	34	40	366
FY 98-99	44	34	33	31	26	31	40	17	34	43	41	36	410
FY 99-00	27	40	34	38	35	23	41	35	56	44	44	49	466
FY 00-01	40	61	46	51	28	35	51	24	34	28	44	44	486
FY 01-02	41	47	35	36	34	40	39	36	46	54	42	44	494
FY 02-03	44	47	36	34	36	53	42	42	36	38	38	46	492
FY 03-04	47	56	51	55	52	38	50	43	44	41	47	57	581
FY 04-05	57	63	43	49	49	62	49	53	59	55	40	58	637
FY 05-06	60	57	51	75	41	65	41	54	61	63	61	61	690
FY 06-07	51	65	59										690
Projection for current year	612	696	700	729	682	698	669	666	673	682	686	690	700

MSH Admissions  
July 1995 through September 2006



Information retrieved from MT State Hospital Website