

Senate Resolution 363

By: Senators Grant of the 25th, Tarver of the 22nd, Unterman of the 45th, Hill of the 4th, Goggans of the 7th and others

A RESOLUTION

- 1 Creating the Mental Health Service Delivery Commission; and for other purposes.
- 2 WHEREAS, recent tragic events in the state mental hospitals, including the death and alleged
3 abuse or neglect of Georgia's citizens living with mental illness, necessitate a comprehensive
4 assessment of Georgia's mental health system and immediate responses to its inpatient and
5 community based systems; and
- 6 WHEREAS, the State of Georgia has historically exercised the responsibility for the safety
7 and care of its citizens who live with mental illnesses and substance abuse; and
- 8 WHEREAS, this responsibility has primarily resided in the Department of Health and later
9 the Department of Human Resources which have administered and developed the state's
10 public hospitals and its system of community care delivered through public and private
11 facilities and individual providers; and
- 12 WHEREAS, the Department of Human Resources also manages Georgia's foster care system
13 for children and adolescents in state custody, many of whom have suffered from abuse and
14 neglect with resulting needs for behavioral health services and supportive foster families; and
- 15 WHEREAS, at the same time, Georgia's citizens who live with these conditions also reside
16 in and sometimes receive treatment services from the Departments of Juvenile Justice, the
17 Department of Corrections, and Georgia's local jails; and
- 18 WHEREAS, these systems and agencies have endured a decline in resources and staffing in
19 the last decade, resulting in fragmented and often inadequate service delivery systems; and
- 20 WHEREAS, this decline in resources has manifested itself in deaths and escapes from our
21 state mental hospitals and the housing of too many citizens living with mental illness and
22 substance abuse in correctional systems not designed for treatment;

1 WHEREAS, Georgia needs an ongoing, effective advocacy system for children and adults
2 living in and receiving services through its systems; and

3 WHEREAS, most of Georgia's citizens in need of mental health and substance abuse
4 services can be safely housed and treated in our communities closer to their families with
5 effective supports delivered by public and private providers and peer counselors; and

6 WHEREAS, Georgia has appropriately articulated and sought, but not yet fulfilled, a policy
7 of de-institutionalization that holds promise for better allocation of resources and more
8 sensitive services for its citizens and their families who endure mental illness and substance
9 abuse; and

10 WHEREAS, the response to these issues requires the appropriate sizing and adequate staffing
11 of our hospitals for Georgia's growing population and the full development and coordination
12 of our community treatment and housing resources; and

13 WHEREAS, forging and coordinating that effort requires leadership and a multifocused,
14 multiagency plan for the new century; and

15 WHEREAS, the General Assembly desires and seeks timely and effective action to ensure
16 that the following challenges are addressed and solutions implemented in the immediate,
17 short, and long terms:

18 (1) Assess the needs of our citizens, both children and adults, for improved behavioral
19 health services and resources wherever they reside;

20 (2) Adequately size, staff, and secure our state hospitals for Georgia's population, taking
21 into account which patients can be safely housed in community settings;

22 (3) Use public and private community resources to relieve overcrowding in state
23 facilities and to develop the full continuum of services and effective supports so
24 Georgia's citizens who live with mental illness and substance abuse may live and work
25 when possible close to their families;

26 (4) Divert Georgians in need of treatment and assistance to community based resources
27 whenever appropriate and provide adequate forensic and treatment services in our
28 institutions;

29 (5) Aggressively develop housing and employment opportunities in our communities;

30 (6) Assure parity in insurance benefits coverage for mental health and substance abuse
31 care so that health issues resulting from lack of adequate treatment are reduced and all

1 our financing resources are used to destigmatize and treat mental illness and substance
2 abuse; and
3 (7) Develop an organizational plan to coordinate or revitalize the agencies involved in
4 mental health and substance abuse services or the financing of those services.

5 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
6 GEORGIA that there is created the Mental Health Service Delivery Commission to be
7 composed of three members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate; three
8 members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of
9 Representatives; a superior court judge experienced in dealing with mental illness and
10 substance abuse appointed by the Council of Superior Court Judges; three citizens appointed
11 by the President of the Senate to represent patients served by the systems described in this
12 resolution, the advocacy groups for mental health or substance abuse, and the law
13 enforcement community; and three citizens appointed by the Speaker of the House of
14 Representatives to represent patients served by the systems described in this resolution, the
15 advocacy groups for mental health or substance abuse, and the law enforcement community.
16 The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall designate a member of the House and the
17 President of the Senate shall designate a member of the Senate to serve as cochairpersons of
18 the committee. The commission shall meet at the call of the cochairpersons.

19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the commission shall undertake a study of the
20 conditions, needs, issues, and problems mentioned above or related thereto and recommend
21 any actions or legislation which the commission deems necessary or appropriate. The
22 commission may conduct such meetings at such places and at such times as it may deem
23 necessary or convenient to enable it to exercise fully and effectively its powers, perform its
24 duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes of this resolution. The members of the
25 commission shall receive the allowances authorized for legislative members of interim
26 legislative committees. The funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this resolution
27 shall come from the funds appropriated to the House of Representatives and Senate. The
28 commission shall make interim reports to the General Assembly on or before January 15,
29 2008, as to the progress of the commission in identifying the difficulties in the state's
30 deliverance of mental health services and developing an organizational plan for coordinating
31 the state's various systems and the financial and staffing needs of these systems to assure a
32 safe and secure system of services. The commission shall make a second interim report on
33 or before January 15, 2009, as to anticipated initial implementation of action. It shall make
34 a final report with a blueprint for action on or before June 30, 2009. The commission shall
35 stand abolished on June 30, 2009.