



West Virginia Advocates

The Protection and Advocacy System for West Virginia

April 27, 2006

Ms. Deborah Reed
WV Dept of Health & Human Resources
Bureau for Behavioral Health & Health Facilities
350 Capitol St , Room 350
Charleston, WV 25301

Re: Public Consulting Group (PCG) Public Disability Specific Focus Groups

Dear Ms Reed,

West Virginia Advocates (WVA) is the federally mandated protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities in West Virginia. WVA attended PCG Focus Group meetings in the following locations: Clarksburg, Charleston, Huntington, Parkersburg, Wheeling and Beckley and submit these comments based on those public meetings.

Overall, WVA feels that the forums were not well publicized and poorly facilitated. As a result, attendance and information gathered at the forums was provider heavy with little consumer participation and input. While some locations provided a list of discussion points, the list was not followed. Further, PCG representatives did little to facilitate structured discussion/input, did not appear to take detailed notes, and made little attempt to summarize either the information being communicated to them, or provide details on how consumer input would be obtained. The PCG representatives were late getting to the forum held in Charleston and some in attendance left before they got there.

It was discussed at the Charleston forum that WV DHHR has a history of bringing consultants in, then doing nothing with the feedback/recommendations. The PCG told forum attendees at the Clarksburg meeting that the state of West Virginia has paid for two studies already and that PCG would be reviewing those. Because of this past history, it is generally felt that WV DHHR is conducting public forums to say they did them, not that they want honest feedback in order to make the system more responsive to consumer needs.

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Consumers are tired of providing feedback so that the WV DHHR can check a box that consumer input was sought. Consumers are tired of footing the bill for expensive consultant groups to come in and go through the motions of listening to them pour their hearts out only to be ignored.

WVA participated for several years on the Behavioral Health Advisory Council that was supposed to be redesigning the behavioral health system of care in West Virginia. The WV DHHR paid a consultant to come in and facilitate the process. Many concerned professionals and providers spent hundreds of hours over the course of those years attending meetings and sub committee meetings, working for the "future directions in a behavioral health redesign" Changes in administration at the WV DHHR brought this process to a screeching halt. The Behavioral Health Advisory Council was disbanded.

It is our sincere hope that this time the WV DHHR will listen to input from consumers, family members, advocates as well as providers and incorporate the valuable input people who rely on DHHR services are offering. Money follows the person is one example. Citizens of West Virginia are hurting and need quality behavioral health care services.

I believe we can all agree that we cannot afford to waste resources. Resources are limited and needy consumers are falling through the cracks of the current system. Please do not waste this opportunity to improve the system that is very much in need of repair.

Sincerely,



Clarice Hausch
Executive Director