

# Speak Out: The sorry state of our mental health care

By Our Readers | Posted: Monday, October 26, 2015 5:17 pm

In an effort to save millions of dollars a year, the State Department of Mental Health has placed the mentally ill in Alabama in extreme danger. It has closed all hospitals except Bryce Hospital and the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center, leaving Alabama with fewer than 500 treatment beds to serve a known population of at least 102,000 upwards to 280,000.

The Treatment Advocacy Center in Washington says

Alabama would need at least 2,400 treatment beds to serve this population. Furthermore, the Department of Mental Health has established policy in conflict with the law that effectively shuts down the Mental Health Officer Program and prevents us from taking people from the street directly to a designated mental health facility (DMHF). It also has further hobbled the probate court by requiring everyone admitted to a DMHF be medically stable.

Neither probate court nor the mental health officer can order medical treatment; therefore, mentally ill people who are not treating their medical illness because of their mental illness will not receive any treatment at all. We all know the mentally ill when in crisis need immediate care, and that left without care will often create a nuisance or act out criminally. Unfortunately, the Department of Mental Health has made treatment unavailable for many and is by default criminalizing the mentally ill. Without crisis beds available, the only choice for their safety is jail.

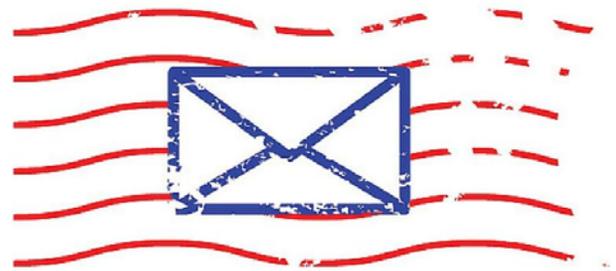
We believe this is unconscionable and immediate action must be taken before those cases that allowed for the creation of our mental health officer program are repeated and people die.

*Larry Amerson*

*Sheriff*

*Calhoun County*

Letters to the Editor



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