

Sandena Bader - Family and Youth Advocate Liaison 1/21/21  
Public Comment MHSA Steering Committee

### **Cal Voices' System Advocates in Sacramento County**

Since 1996-1997, Sacramento County's Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) has contracted with Cal Voices for the Client Advocate Liaison, Family Advocate Liaison, and Family and Youth Coordinator positions embedded in the County's Adult and Children's Systems of Care.<sup>1</sup> When Cal Voices and Sacramento County partnered to create the Client Advocate Liaison role in 1996, it was the very first position of its kind in the entire state. Since then, other California counties have replicated this model of consumer inclusion and leadership at the system level.

Since 2014, I have held the role of Family/Youth Coordinator in the SAFE program serving as the family and youth advocate liaison with BHS. Under the County's proposal, Cal Voices advocacy contract will be defunded and I will be without a job potentially along with the diverse staff I manage. I ask, why the County would cut these hard-working individuals at this time so that they can create an internal program.

### **The County Can Hire Peer Managers Without Cutting Cal Voices' Funding**

In October and November 2020, the County released two Requests for Applications (RFAs) for programs that, combined, will employ approximately 24 peer positions.<sup>2</sup> DBHS placed one of these contracts out to bid because the agency that previously operated the program no longer wanted it. Both programs include positions comparable to the Behavioral Health Peer Specialist Manager role. As of this date, the County has not yet awarded contracts for these RFAs.

We believe it lacks organizational justice to defund the existing advocates when there is no budget shortfall in Sacramento County's MHSA, and you have expanded millions of dollars in inpatient funding over the past several years, including the use of MHSA funds for a locked inpatient facility at the Dignity Behavioral Health Collaborative.

Sacramento County has sufficient funding to fund these positions without cutting our Advocates. I will be forced to terminate 2 African American advocates, 4 Latino/Spanish Speaking Advocates, and 1 LGBTQ advocate. All at a time when Sacramento County needs to be building more bridges to these communities not reducing services to them – as a result of the recent CIBHS Racial Equity Survey.

The Division delivered this news to myself and the other advocates during Christmas week, and we have been in a state of upheaval ever since. I feel it's important that the County present a full plan of the program they are developing for the community to weigh in on before the Steering Committee comes to a vote on these positions. We have worked hard and do not deserve this treatment by the County. We are in the midst of a pandemic and continue to seamlessly deliver our services during COVID, never once reducing services or cancelling our important support

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<sup>1</sup> The Client Advocate Liaison, Family Advocate Liaison, and Family and Youth Coordinator positions are collectively referred to as "System Advocates" throughout this letter.

groups. Now, we are being penalized without cause because the County wants to fund its own programs.

### **Cutting the Three System Advocate Positions Will Not Pay for Three Peer Managers**

Even if the County's fiscal condition is much worse than depicted in the FY2020-21 MHSA budget, the amount of funding the County will realize by cutting Cal Voices' three System Advocates is not enough to pay for three Peer Managers. Because it costs the County more to provide services and hire staff directly than it does to contract them out, the County has traditionally relied on contracted providers to deliver approximately 90% of its behavioral health services.

<sup>1</sup> The County released RFA MHSA/065 on October 15, 2020 for a Crisis Navigation Program and RFA MHSA/066, for Community Support Team Peers on November 4, 2020.

Additionally, the County placed the Community Support Team Peers program out to bid because the agency that previously operated it (Crossroads Diversified Services, Inc.) no longer wanted the contract.