

To Whom It May Concern,

I truly do not wish to create any issues for my department, but I feel I am obligated to inform the Mental Health Board of decisions being made within that have far-reaching ramifications. This is the email I sent out to administrative members that I knew to contact. I have left out their responses as I was not sure including them without permission would be appropriate.

Regards,

Walter England

Peer Support Worker

From: Walter England

Sent: Monday, August 31, 2020 11:26 AM

To: Karen Larsen <Karen.Larsen@yolocounty.org>; Karleen Jakowski <Karleen.Jakowski@yolocounty.org>; Tony Kildare <Tony.Kildare@yolocounty.org>; Laura Christensen <Laura.Christensen@yolocounty.org>; Mila Green <Mila.Green@yolocounty.org>; Julie Freitas <Julie.Freitas@yolocounty.org>

Subject: An Urgent Request Regarding FSP Clients

Dear Karen Larson et al,

In light of recent events, I feel that I am obligated to reach out to you and express my concerns about the administrative decisions that are being made regarding FSP clients as well as its impact on the program of which I am a part. I wish to preface my following statement by saying that I mean no disrespect to the difficult work you all engage in during this trying financial period. I understand that administrators must sometimes make a choice that they think causes the least damage rather than the most benefit.

Nevertheless, I have grave concerns about the consequences of the decision to contract out our FSP services, both as a member of staff and a former client. Not only have I heard from others the impact that ending the TAY program or simply downsizing it has had on clients in the past, I lived it myself. I can attest to personal experience how devastating it can be to lose this resource and the reality that transitions like these create. If you will permit me, I will take a moment to speak on this without too much elaboration.

I was a non-FSP client back in 2010 when the financial crisis hit California programs like this one. The TAY program had not only brought me out of homelessness, but it helped me separate myself from an unhealthy and dangerous relationship with a parent and provided a home in a community that I had never had before. When the first impacts were felt, it started as a locational change. The program was moved from its properties on E. Gum Avenue to the Bauer building. This wasn't terribly difficult, but when staff started getting cut immediately afterward, my friends and I started to worry. It wasn't long before there was only one staff member left for not only the TAY program but for the adult wellness program as well. Most of the services that were essential to clients like me simply disappeared. People fell out of the system. I was lucky that those other clients I'd met had become my friends because the structure was gone. I had

nothing else. Still, there were consequences down the line for losing those resources, ones for which I am still paying.

And if this had happened once, that would be one thing. But I have come to understand that it has happened more times since then. Every time this happens clients suffer. It may seem like a hard-financial choice that has to be made, but the consequences are dire. It is more than simply disheartening to see this happen again. It is heartbreaking. Even though a plan is in place to move clients into new programs and to allow staff to find positions elsewhere in the agency, this won't address the problems that come from destroying a community. These are incredibly vulnerable people. They rely on this program not just as a resource, but as a source of stability, especially in the situation we're all living in right now. This change will undoubtedly send some clients spiraling into dark places that they have struggled to keep themselves out of. I know this because I've been there.

And most of all, we are talking about FSP clients: the most vulnerable, in-need clients we treat in this program. To think that this won't have consequences that are far-reaching and will take a very long time to recover from is shortsighted at best. I mean no disrespect, but the fact that this is being considered suggests that I am obligated to state it aloud. We are not just county employees. We are civil servants. We serve the people in our care. We not only have a moral obligation to them; it is in our job description.

I cannot speak with any degree of efficacy on the financial arguments for maintaining our existing programs. I leave that up to my clinical supervisor and the talented case managers and clinicians in this program, who have time and again reiterated how much this program provides in billable hours or the portion that is provided directly by MHSA funding. I can only speak to my personal experience, to my fears, as a person who has been part of the mental health system for much of their life. We are all just people trying to make things work. But we need to do better than this. Not for ourselves, but for the people we serve.

My hope is that this message will be the first step in a larger dialogue regarding this issue. I am more than open to carrying a larger conversation about this. If you have questions or would like me to elaborate on something I've mentioned here, please reach out to me. I know that there is a path forward where we can work together and achieve the best possible outcome for both the department and our community.

Sincerely,
Walter England
Peer Support Worker