

**PUBLIC HEARING OF THE
2023 HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT BUDGET**
August 25, 2022

Human Services Board Members Present: Agnew, Brey, Bruns, Klein, Naidl, Ruggirello, Shimulunas

Board Members Excused: Baumann, Burke

Board Members Absent: None

County Staff Present: L. Fure, Kubec, Dodge, Ziegelbauer

CALL TO ORDER:

The Public Hearing for input into the 2023 Human Services Budget was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Human Services Board Chair Jim Brey. Chair Brey read the Ground Rules for testifying.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chair Brey introduced the first speaker to give testimony - Donna Firman from the League of Women Voters and also NAMI whose topic was a Mental Health Court.

Thank you everyone, I'm Donna Firman I'm the Board President of NAMI of Manitowoc County which is the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I'm also part of the mental health committee of the League of Women Voters. I'm here today to talk about a mental health court. A very innovative, we think, approach that we would like to take to a mental health court and that innovative approach is really a non-profit, private, public alliance or partnership to delivering the services that we need to mental health court. What we think that it will do, will save the county money without having the county actually spend money. So, it impacts the budget in that it creates a savings for the county, again without having the county spend money. The way that works, is that it will save, the upside of mental health court, like drug court is that it saves jail time and it reduces recidivism. When people graduate from treatment court or what we call often times, problem solving court. The mental health court will drive the delivery of community health care, specifically behavioral health care services. We have seen this around the country, and we have seen it actually in drug court services here in Manitowoc County. Lighthouse Recovery Community didn't exist before drug court, CORE Treatment Services didn't exist before drug court so when we have a treatment court or a problem solving court, we know that the outcropping of that is more services for the community and those services are delivered for the community at large, not just the drug court or in this case the mental health court participants and we have seen it in other places too, for example the model that we are following is from St. Tammany, Louisiana.

In St. Tammany, Louisiana NAMI administers the mental health court in that jurisdiction, and that is what we are proposing in Manitowoc County and that actually reduces the workload for Human Services by having NAMI take that part of the work from Human Services and put it at NAMI instead of having Human Services take on any additional workload. The NAMI in St. Tammany has been successfully administering mental health court for 11 years. And has been doing a great job at it and has a model that we will be able to follow, and St. Tammany will mentor the NAMI in Manitowoc County to deliver these services. It won't cost Human Services or the county anything to do this.

We will fund this model through private foundations and we are seeking funding right now, federal grants and corporate funding, as well. So again, we are not asking for money but we know the county is going to reap the benefits of this particular model. It's innovative, it's different, we are getting a little, I'm not going to call it push back, but we are hearing some concerns and I would like to address some of those concerns. One of the concerns that we are getting is we can't have people start in mental health court until we know they are fully funded and that is obvious. In my view that would be unethical to start somebody if we have a year's worth of funding and we know it is going to take 18 months to get through the program, we can't start people until we know they are fully funded, that goes without saying, and we wouldn't do that. We will make sure people are fully funded before we start them in the court. We will have adequate planning periods to get everything up and running before we start admitting people into the court. We have a judge on board, who's prepared to move forward with this plan, and thinks that it will be successful, and we think that it is time for innovation in treatment court and we are prepared to deliver that. Thank you. I have copies of the mental health study for mental health court if you have any interest in that, I will be able to give you copies.

Chair Brey introduced Mary Wallace from the League of Women Voters whose topic was a Mental Health Court.

Donna said almost everything I wanted to say, but we appreciate how overwhelmed the Human Services Department is and full disclosure, I used to work here, I felt it was overwhelming then and I can see it is way more overwhelming now. We can't expect them to do everything for everybody. So, we'd like you to be open to the idea that a small group of community members can start big things. We have the Boys and Girls Club, we have CASA, and going back in time, that is how Incourage got started and so we are looking at continuing that community involvement, to meet another community needs and to get people with mental health issues out of the criminal justice system and into treatment and a better life for them. So, I think and I've heard, because we've asked the Human Services Department and we know that they have many needs, or things they see as needs that maybe they see as a bigger priority than the mental health court because they have kind of a big picture but we're thinking that the mental health court will draw other services that they may want to have. That is what happened with the drug court and we expect it to happen so we are open to pursuing community involvement with other things that are needed that would come, hopefully, with that.

Chair Brey introduced Nancy Slattery from RUTH and League of Women Voters whose topic was the budget.

I wrote on my card that I represent two things RUTH, with is a social justice interfaith social justice group in town and the League, I am a member of both. I feel I am also a member of the citizen league that you serve, not just because I wear hats but because I'm a citizen of the county. A lot of county people have (I called one this morning), that has no health insurance, except for a Christian based saving account and she can't afford even the deductible for Obama Care, the premium for that, so those are also your responsibility. I know I have been to a few meetings at the library here where we discuss mental health care and people who are on Obama Care and the deductibles are so high, and you talk about changes that are being made by government agencies for applying the rules and they talk about oh, this is great, this is great, and I thought they solved the one that was just up, the one for child care in the last federal bill that was passed, they talk about it before hand, but it didn't get passed so it is not included in there, so there is no child care benefit in the new federal bill. So, it is awfully hard to find out what really is the law, because there is a lot of lack of transparency.

I was on a drug court of a criminal justice coordinating council, sub-committee Zoom meeting this morning and they referenced a lot of evidenced based treatment courts that are being refunded (they have had their 3 year grant) and are reapplying like Manitowoc County did, and they had over 61 applications for the refunding, so these are all courts that are being re-upped with money, or considered, nobody has any promises yet, (Patricia you don't have to worry that you didn't hear yet). But they are planning to re-up them, now I did not, because I was a member of the public, I didn't have a right to ask questions, so I don't know if that includes any mental health courts, because this is the way government operates, we can listen and we can talk but we don't get real direct answers, that are factual right that day or right that minute, and so that's why I ask you guys to be the ones to ask that question, to be pushy, to be inquisitive as to what is available to your neighbor, your son, your cousin who has mental illness, what is really available to them in services. Because we all know you have to treat a problem before it gets so big. We've seen newspaper headlines saying horrible things happen in jail, horrible things in prison. Prison should not be where mental health is treated, they are put on a shelf and they are told if your sentence is over in 20 years, in 20 years when you get out we'll deal with you, that's not human, and I don't think you want that for your own child or yourself.

I encourage you to find ways to help those who are willing to put the effort in and we certainly area not going to fund this out of our own pockets, I mean I do have 200 acres I could sell, but I don't want to. It is something that the county has funds, that are given to the county, I don't know where the funds came from that will be used to finish off everything that is necessary at the courthouse. But some of that money, I as an individual with family who doesn't live here, but I do, would think some of it should go to the citizens not just the building, but that is a choice that the county has to make. I encourage you to look at the people whose needs are there and bring their needs up. We all know and you all hear about the many needs in the county that are evident to you through the different education topics and I have learned so much through attending these meetings and I applaud all of you who have re-upped for the job. Thank you

Since there was no other public comment, Douglas Klein moved to close the Public Hearing and Eleanor Agnew seconded. Motion carried.

The Public Hearing closed at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Brey, Acting Secretary
Human Services Board

JB/jk