

Commissioners:

SCOTT L. METZGER
Chairman

TONY R. MUSSARE
Vice Chairman

RICHARD MIRABITO
Secretary



MATTHEW A. McDERMOTT
*Director of Administration
and Chief Clerk*

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**LYCOMING COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 2023
10:00 A.M.**

Present: Commissioner Metzger, Commissioner Mirabito, Director Matthew McDermott, and Solicitor Chris Kenyon. Commissioner Mussare not present.

1.0 OPERATIONS

- 1.1 Opening Prayer
- 1.2 Pledge of Allegiance
- 1.3 Convene Commissioners' Public Meeting
- 1.4 Approve the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

- 1.5 Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

None

- 1.6 Acknowledge the Montgomery Area Windbreakers team as national champions at the National KidWind Challenge in Boulder, Colorado:
 - Peter Ruhl, Coach
 - Elizabeth Zettlemyer, Chaperone and Assistant to Coach
 - Waylynn Barrows
 - Lyle Huggler
 - Isaiah Mowrey
 - Weston Sherman
 - Bryar Walk

Coach Ruhl introduced the team and praised the boy's efforts. He described how he got involved in the project. Lyle Huggler explained the steps they took to get to the National Championship and described what they made, a wind turbine.

Mr. Mirabito expressed their appreciation for the initiative shown by the teacher, appreciation for the project the students completed and competed for as well as their parents and caretakers.

2.0 SERVICE AWARDS

- 2.1 Board of Commissioners – Recognize the following individuals on their service to Lycoming County:
 - District Attorney's Office – Calvin Irvin – 10 years

Presented by Ryan Gardner, District Attorney. Mr. Gardner described Calvin as a dedicated city employee who goes above and beyond, always answering the call. He added that it has been a distinct privilege to work with Calvin.

Mr. Metzger added that in addition to being dedicated, Calvin is always prepared. He thanked Calvin for his years of service and expressed appreciation for all Calvin has done for the County and the constituents over the years.

Mr. Mirabito thanked Calvin for his years of service, the risks that he has taken and the great attitude he always displays.

- Voter Services – Mary Kay Camp – 39 years

Presented by Forrest Lehman. Mr. Lehman noted that Mary Kay has spent her career in public service. She has given decades to this office and to make democracy happen. He described working with Mary Kay as a pleasure and an honor, and stated that voters have been well served by her.

Mary Kay thanked everyone for coming out. She stated that it has been great working for the County. The friends she has made here are lifetime friends.

Mr. Metzger voiced that Mary Kay always greets everyone with a smile. He described her as sweet, kind and full of integrity. The County will be poorer without you. She has served the constituents extremely well and we owe you an enormous debt of gratitude. Mr. Metzger wished her well during her retirement and thanked her for all of her years of service.

Mr. Mirabito told Mary Kay that she is an incredible first impression for people who don't know anything about the County. It tells the public that we are here to assist you. We appreciate that and all you did. Thank You.

Coworker commented that this is a loss to the County. They described Mary Kay as always calm and forthright with everyone.

3.0 REPORTS

- 3.1 Kalen Barnes – Vote to ratify invoices due through 7/05/23 to be paid on 6/28/23 in the amount of \$1,134,105.39.**

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

4.0 PERSONNEL ACTIONS

- 4.1 Jessica Segraves – Approve the following Personnel Actions as conditional offers of employment, subject to the successful completion of a background check and all other employment conditions as outlined in Attachment (A).**

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

Ms. Seagraves announced that there are only three Correction Officer positions left to be filled which is the lowest it has been in 1 ½ years. Mr. Metzger thanked everyone involved and informed everyone that this has been a problem state wide.

Recess Commissioners' Public Meeting for the Salary Board

5.0 SALARY BOARD

5.1 Convene Salary Board.

5.2 Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve the following salary board actions as outlined in Attachment (B).

Ms. Gottschall requested to review and vote on sections on Attachment B individually.

Ms. Gottschall made the motion. Mr. Mirabito 2nd the motion. Approved 3-0

See Attachment B for voting and comments.

5.3 Adjourn Salary Board.

Reconvene Commissioners' Public Meeting

6.0 TDA ACTIONS

6.1 Jessica Segraves – Approve the following TDA actions as outlined in Attachment (C).

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

Recess Commissioners' Public Meeting for the Board of Assessment Revisions

7.0 BOARD OF ASSESSMENT REVISIONS

7.1 Convene Board of Assessment Revisions.

7.2 Brooke Wright – Approve the following real estate tax refund:

- 26-010-108.C – Williamsport Hospitality - \$18,153.17
- 65-013-399 – CS Hospitality - \$2,116.97

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

7.3 Adjourn Board of Assessment Revisions.

Reconvene Commissioners' Public Meeting

8.0 ACTION ITEMS

8.1 Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve Resolution 2023-12 urging the General Assembly to address the update reauthorization of Chapter 53 of Title 35.

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

Mr. Mirabito explained that the funding for the 911 system comes from surcharges. The time for these surcharges is running out. The Resolution is telling the General Assembly that the system has worked and kept the 911 system operating. The public will pay a little more but 911 is critical to all of our lives.

Beth Baylor added that what the Governor's office has put in for the budget is a lesser

amount than what CCAP has asked for and it will not be enough for 911 to stay afloat. This resolution is asking for a larger increase in funding and a yearly increase to follow so that the system is not stuck in the same funding for several years. The surcharge would be on monthly land line or cell phones.

8.2 Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve Resolution 2023-14 supporting increased funding for community-based mental health services.

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

Mr. Jim Hicklin Lycoming County MH/ID Program Director read a statement – see attached Mr. Mirabito informed the public that there has been no change/increase in the base level funding for mental health services in 18 years. He also pointed out that we need to get rid of the stigma of mental health services and made an analogy to a physical disease such as cancer.

Mr. Hicklin commented that base funding allows the counties to be more flexible and creative with their programming as there are not as many regulations and restrictions attached.

Mr. Metzger shared that he is concerned that the state is putting conditions on the funding and that it will be awarded to the counties that have competitive grant writers. This can hurt the counties that don't have good grant writers and also could hurt rural communities. He believes the state needs to reevaluate this.

Mr. Keith Wagner- Administrator Lycoming County MH/ID Program – CCAP is asking the state to recognize that funding has been flat funded for almost 20 years and to begin in some incremental way to increase the funding so services previously cut can be restored, not just a onetime infusion of funds.

Mr. Mirabito commented that a onetime infusion doesn't allow you to build and develop a mental health infrastructure. You need a sustainable amount of money to do this.

Mr. Wagner added that fewer students are choosing careers in mental health due to the uncertainty.

Mr. Metzger and Mr. Mirabito encouraged the public to contact their state and federal representatives and urge them to commit more money to mental health.

8.3 Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve the Williamsport Investment Program Summary of Terms with Arctaris Impact Investors, LLC.

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

Mr. Mirabito informed the public that this is an exciting opportunity and question for the public. He reiterated the information presented during the last public meeting on 6.22.23. First Community Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, City of Williamsport and County are all being asked to commit \$1,250,000 each for the project. This is a loan, not a grant. It is a first lost capital loan. The investment fund will put in 20 million dollars. The money will be invested in the three Federal Tax Opportunity Areas in the city. Per Mr. Mirabito, this brings 25 million dollars' worth of investment into the city. The fund makes the decision on what the money is invested in. Mr. Mirabito read examples that the fund could be used for. He further explained that this is a loan with an initial 9-year term but with the possibility of it being extended for six years beyond that. The loan accrues 2% each year for the first 9 years. None of this is paid until the end of the term of the loan. If the loan is extended the rate of

return is based on federal rates. The loan is a first lost capital which means the four investors are the first ones to lose the capital if it fails and the last ones to be paid if it succeeds. After the 9th year the principal amount can be repaid if it meets certain stipulations. This is very different than the loan made for the mall. The document they voted on today is nonbinding. He added that it is not often that we get the opportunity to put 25 million dollars into the community. The goal of this is to spur economic development with the hope that other people will come and make additional investments in the community.

Mr. Metzger informed everyone that the Chamber, City and First Community Foundation have all voted in favor of the opportunity.

Ms. Jen Wilson – First Community Foundation – She informed the public that the organization does a lot of social impact funding across the United States. The foundation became aware of them through the work they are doing with Erie, PA. The Federal Opportunity Zones have been around for a long time, but are areas that have not seen a lot of economic development. The vote taken by all the four entities is just stating that they are interested in moving forward and developing the terms of the project.

Mr. McDermott offered that this is similar to a letter of intent when someone would purchase a property.

Ms. Wilson discussed that during prior informational meetings they identified some of the challenges the City and County face. One thing that was pointed out is that we have the opportunity for jobs but not the population to support these jobs. We need to look at what will make Williamsport attractive to people for them to stay.

Mr. Mirabito pointed out that Williamsport is the economic engine for the county. When the city grows the county will grow. When the city declines the county declines.

Ms. Wilson offered that the County has some ingredients that the Investment company has seen success in prior projects – anchor institutions, health care in the city and colleges. These ingredients made us a good location to invest in.

8.4 Mya Toon/Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve Business Rental Preferred Rate Agreement with Penrac, LLC. (2023 budgeted item).

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

8.5 Mya Toon/Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve and award bid for Flood Mitigation, Acquisition and Demolition to Steinbacher Enterprises, Inc. in the amount of \$84,464.00 (CDBG-DR & HMGP funded).

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

8.6 Mya Toon/Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve Letter of Intent with Lycoming-Clinton Joinder Board.

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

Mr. Keith Wagner, Administrator Lycoming County MH/ID – indicated that the needs of the program and staff have changed over the years. They no longer need such a large space. The rent they currently pay comes from the funding which will now be able to be put back into services. In addition, the move will put us all in one place and closer to the other Human Service offices they interface with. In addition, the amount of funding Children & Youth need from the County will be decreased.

Mr. Metzger offered that it will be a savings of \$572,000 a year. From this approximately

\$380,000 can be put back into services.

Mr. Metzger and Mr. Wagner thanked the landlord of the Sharwell building for working with them over the years.

8.7 Mya Toon/Matthew McDermott – Vote to approve Agreement with Frank M. Dattilio in an amount not to exceed \$20,000.00 (2023 budgeted item).

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

8.8 Beth Baylor – Vote to approve Subscription Agreement with Technology Enterprise Group, Inc. (2023 budgeted item).

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-0

9.0 COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Mr. Metzger commented on all of the Fourth of July activities happening in the County. He encouraged everyone to celebrate safely, especially with fireworks. Mr. Metzger hopes everyone enjoys the holiday with their family and friends. Mr. Metzger announced that Jersey Shore will have a week-long celebration for Founders Day from July 2nd through July 8th. The parade, which they will be attending, will be held on July 6th.

10.0 GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Speakers who wish to address the Board of Commissioners will be limited for no more than three (3) minutes on any particular item. The speaker must state his/her name and address for the record. Any deviation from this rule must be approved by the Board

Marc Sortman – Loyalsock, Mr. Sortman told the Commissioners that he thinks it is great that they are ending the lease for the Sharwell Building. He asked for an update on the sale of Executive Plaza. Mr. McDermott responded that a draft agreement of sale was being reviewed by Horizon.

Tom Adams, Williamsport – Tom commented on the 4th of July holiday, a time to celebrate the founding of our country and its struggles. He quoted Psalms. Tom talked about John Winthrop who founded Boston and the warning he gave. Tom expressed his opinion on the consequences needed for elected officials that break their oath of office.

You Tube Public Comment

Christopher Cooper Jennifer Hartley..... even criminals get a raise in this county!!!

11.0 NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The next Commissioners' Public Meeting will be held on Thursday, July 6, 2023, at 10:00 A.M. in the Commissioners' Board Room, 1st Floor, Executive Plaza, 330 Pine Street, Williamsport, PA 17701.

To View This Meeting Follow The Link Below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Emm_i_RuLFA

ATTACHMENT (A)

PERSONNEL ACTIONS:

- Resource Management Services – Randy Ritter, Recycling Laborer, Full-Time New Position, \$14.50 per hour, 80 hours per Pay Period, Anticipated Start Date: July 10, 2023.
- Resource Management Services – Kristin Perez, Resource Recovery Assistant Manager, Full-Time Replacement, \$50,641.50 per year, 80 hours per Pay Period, Anticipated Start Date: July 10, 2023.
- Prison – Zain Hill, Correctional Officer I, Full-Time Replacement, \$20.00 per hour, 80 hours per Pay Period, Anticipated Start Date: July 16, 2023.

ATTACHMENT (B)

SALARY BOARD ACTIONS:

- Request to apply a 1% Compensation Adjustment per the Compensation Policy:
 - Human Resources – Kane Angell, Recruitment Specialist, Paygrade 6, Adjustment of 1%.

Ms. Gottschall made the motion. Mr. Mirabito 2nd the motion. Approved 3-0

- Request to approve changing the following position to an exempt status:
 - Resource Management Services – Resource Recovery Assistant Manager, Paygrade 9, Full-Time, 80 hours per Pay Period.

Ms. Gottschall made the motion. Mr. Mirabito 2nd the motion. Approved 3-0

- Request to add an \$.85 compensation adjustment to the following employees:
 - Assessment
 - Nakisha Cramer, Field Data Collector, Paygrade 6.
 - Clerk of Courts:
 - Diana Richardson, Administrative Specialist, Paygrade 6.
 - Ashlea Woolley, Criminal Processing Clerk, Paygrade 5.
 - Kevin Williams, Criminal Processing Clerk, Paygrade 5.
 - Communication Center:
 - Shirley Hamm, Administrative Specialist, Paygrade 6.
 - Cooperative Extension:
 - Barbara Davenport, Clerk IV, Paygrade 5.
 - Courts:
 - Phyllis Feese-Guyette, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Stephanie Snyder, Clerk IV, Paygrade 5.
 - Jerri Rook, Executive Secretary, Paygrade 5.
 - Ekaterina Ferguson, Executive Secretary, Paygrade 5.
 - District Attorney:
 - Alexandria Hensler, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Domestic Relations:
 - Carla Bergren, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Emergency Medical Services
 - Jenifer Hope, Clerk IV, Paygrade 5.
 - Facilities Management
 - Regina Rooker, Operations Coordinator, Paygrade 6.
 - Haz-Mat
 - Irvin Temple, SARA Sup. Specialist, Paygrade 5.
 - Juvenile Probation
 - Nancy Ackley, Administrative Specialist, Paygrade 6.
 - Courtney English, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Information Services
 - Rhonda Bodle, Records Retention Coordinator, Paygrade 6.

- Military Affairs
 - Keely Hitchens, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
- Prison
 - Tammy Toner, Administrative Specialist, Paygrade 6.
- Prothonotary
 - Brandy Lechette, Civil Processing Clerk, Paygrade 4.
 - Sharon Greene, Civil Processing Clerk, Paygrade 5.
- Register and Recorder
 - Dartha Wascher, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Leslie Carnevale, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Daniel Hartman, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
- Resource Management Services
 - Bethany Stugart, Administrative Specialist/Training Coordinator, Paygrade 6.
 - Deanna Neidig, Clerk III/Weighmaster, Paygrade 4.
 - Sharon Mull, Clerk III/Weighmaster, Paygrade 4.
 - Michelle Egli, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Jessica Dibartolomeo, Clerk III/AP Weighmaster, Paygrade 4.
- Sheriff's Office
 - Candace Dawes, Clerk IV, Paygrade 5.
 - Michele McDermott, Administrative Specialist, Paygrade 6.
 - Jennifer Hartley, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
 - Charlene Matlack, Clerk III, Paygrade 4.
- Conservation District
 - Mary Denise Moser, Administrative Specialist, Paygrade 6.

Mr. Mirabito moved to approve. Mr. Metzger 2nd the motion. Approved 2-1

Comments:

Mr. Mirabito explained to the public that these positions were not previously dealt with in the compensation adjustments that were made throughout the County. In order to bring equity and closure to the compensation review we made these adjustments. Moving forward reclassifications will be done at budget time.

Ms. Seagraves informed that they looked at the administrative and clerical roles in paygrades 4,5,6 for those that did not receive a compensation policy adjustment in the fall of 22 or this year, or a reclassification

Mr. Metzger added that nothing has been done to the County compensation package on a large scale since 1988- 35 years. This board decided to tackle the issue last year. This is not easy. These are tax dollars. We must stay within a budget. We tried to make it a fair market value to comparable jobs. We allocated 1.2 million plus cost of living. We understand that employees are the most important asset of the County. We tried to be fair and equitable. Offices don't run without administrative assistants. We have put out an RFP to look at overall compensation for the future. The results will be reviewed at budget time.

Mr. Mirabito stated that this compensation cost was \$63,000. During COVID many positions

we not able to be filled which saved the County 3 million dollars. Currently, these costs are covered by the amount saved during COVID.

Mr. Metzger – These adjustments were also made for retention of employees. It costs more when an employee leaves to hire and train a new employee.

Ms. Seagraves – Employees should refer to the letter they received in January to determine if they received a compensation adjustment or a reclassification. These, coupled with the type of position an employee holds and the pay grade would determine if they are eligible. Employees can call her with any questions. Every nonunion employee got a letter in January. If an employee is not on the list they may already have received it or if they were hired in this calendar year the position was already accessed.

Mr. Metzger- There are approximately 400 non-union employees. The people listed today are employees that hadn't received the compensation. In 2014 the County got rid of the STEP system. Nothing was put in its place. There hasn't been an adjustment in 35 years and it needed to be addressed.

Ms. Seagraves – The RFP will help us to establish a strategic compensation plan for the future and stay competitive.

Mr. McDermott – The purpose of the compensation policy was to find a way to be more competitive in the recruiting process and offer more than just the starting salary. The policy looked at giving credit for additional experience and education above what the position calls for. In order to do this with new employees we had apply it to existing employees.

Ms. Seagraves- The policy has helped with the recruitment. The number of open positions has decreased. The health center has also helped and is an added benefit.

Mr. Mirabito explained that the County is a self-funded healthcare system. The County pays for every claim dollar for dollar. The health center reduces the County's cost for healthcare.

Mr. Metzger- During the last three years the health insurance has decreased from 14 million to 11 million.

Ms. Seagraves promoted her employee work groups.

Ms. Gottschall stated that the Controller has instructed her to vote no because of piecemealing the compensation.

ATTACHMENT (C)

TDA ACTIONS:

- Request to approve changing the following position to an exempt status:
 - Resource Management Services – Resource Recovery Assistant Manager, Paygrade 9, Full-Time, 80 hours per Pay Period.



"Windbreakers"
of
Montgomery, Pennsylvania

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

THIS AWARD IS PRESENTED TO *Waylyn Barrows* FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE

— NATIONAL KIDWIND CHALLENGE —
BOULDER, COLORADO
2023

DEMONSTRATING EXEMPLARY TEAM WORK — EXTRAORDINARY IDEAS AND
BEING AN INSPIRATIONAL CITIZENS OF LYCOMING COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Scott L. Metzger

Tony R. Mussare

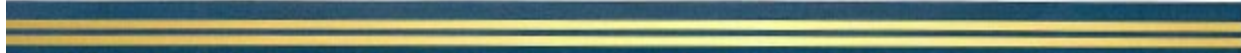
Richard Mirabito

Commissioner Scott L. Metzger

Commissioner Tony Mussare

Commissioner Richard Mirabito





"Windbreakers"
of
Montgomery, Pennsylvania

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

THIS AWARD IS PRESENTED TO *Lyle Huggler* FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE

— NATIONAL KIDWIND CHALLENGE —
BOULDER, COLORADO

2023

DEMONSTRATING EXEMPLARY TEAM WORK — EXTRAORDINARY IDEAS AND
BEING AN INSPIRATIONAL CITIZENS OF LYCOMING COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Scott L. Metzger

Commissioner Scott L. Metzger

Tony R. Mussare

Commissioner Tony Mussare

Richard Mirabito

Commissioner Richard Mirabito





"Windbreakers"
of
Montgomery, Pennsylvania

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

THIS AWARD IS PRESENTED TO *Isaiah Mowrey* FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE

— NATIONAL KIDWIND CHALLENGE —
BOULDER, COLORADO

2023

DEMONSTRATING EXEMPLARY TEAM WORK — EXTRAORDINARY IDEAS AND
BEING AN INSPIRATIONAL CITIZENS OF LYCOMING COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Scott L. Metzger

Commissioner Scott L. Metzger

Tony R. Mussare

Commissioner Tony Mussare

Richard Mirabito

Commissioner Richard Mirabito





"Windbreakers"
of
Montgomery, Pennsylvania

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

THIS AWARD IS PRESENTED TO *Weston Sherman* FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE

— NATIONAL KIDWIND CHALLENGE —
BOULDER, COLORADO

2023

DEMONSTRATING EXEMPLARY TEAM WORK — EXTRAORDINARY IDEAS AND
BEING AN INSPIRATIONAL CITIZENS OF LYCOMING COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Scott L. Metzger

Commissioner Scott L. Metzger

Tony R. Mussare

Commissioner Tony Mussare

Richard Mirabito

Commissioner Richard Mirabito





"Windbreakers"
of
Montgomery, Pennsylvania

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

THIS AWARD IS PRESENTED TO *Bryar Walk* FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE

— NATIONAL KIDWIND CHALLENGE —
BOULDER, COLORADO

2023

**DEMONSTRATING EXEMPLARY TEAM WORK — EXTRAORDINARY IDEAS AND
BEING AN INSPIRATIONAL CITIZENS OF LYCOMING COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

Scott L. Metzger

Commissioner Scott L. Metzger

Tony R. Mussare

Commissioner Tony Mussare

Richard Mirabito

Commissioner Richard Mirabito



Jim Hicklin, County MHID County Program Director- Comments

Thank you, Commissioner's for this proclamation and for bringing attention to a mental health system in crisis. Good morning, my name is Jim Hicklin and I'm the County Mental Health Program Director at Lycoming/Clinton Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities.

Flat line funding and budget cuts over the last two decades have turned what was a robust, responsive service delivery system into a crumbling system in danger of collapse. Not just here in Williamsport, but across Pennsylvania we see mental health needs far exceeding available resources. This imbalance creates added expense and strain on our local medical systems, school systems, legal systems, and our families. But the largest burden is born on the backs of the 1 in 5 adults who will experience some form of mental health difficulty this year, and those living with chronic mental illness. Its these individuals who are forced to wait on extensive waitlists to see a psychiatrist, a therapist, or travel out of town to receive the support and services which they should be receiving here at home. Failure by the Commonwealth to adequately fund the mental health system has forced Mental Health Administrators to defund programs such as group homes, partial hospitalization programs, and specialized long term structured residential programs, each of which a piece in a continuum of care which had in the past diverted our consumers from involvement with law enforcement, the legal system, and state hospitalization. Equally as important, it provided our consumers the ability to receive services in their own community.

Due to closure of the above-mentioned programs, we see our county jails and local emergency rooms being called upon to serve as residential facilities for individuals with mental health difficulties, a role which neither were intended to serve. We see police officers being called upon to serve as front line crisis intervention specialists and therapists, roles for which the police were never intended. Sadly, all too frequently we learn of another suicide occurring in Lycoming County because someone has grown weary and hopeless, unable to cope any longer with the symptoms of their illness.

Over the Past couple years, the mental health system has benefitted from a number of opportunities to apply for Federal money in the form of grants. While these funds have certainly helped a cash strapped mental health system, these funds were one-time only and not sustainable. Consequently, what we see is a flash in the pan response to a crisis twenty years in the making. This is not an adequate response. The only way out of this crisis is through our lawmakers in Harrisburg making a long-term commitment to rebuilding a sustainable forward-thinking service delivery system through long term increased mental health base funding. In closing I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today and again, thank you for bringing this crisis to the forefront.