

Pan American Mental Health Clinics, Inc.

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Testimony of fred Ramirez, President CEO of Pan-American Mental Health Services before the House Human Services Committee Hearings- Philadelphia, Pa.-April 9, 2015

Good afternoon members of the House Human services Committee.

My name is Fred Ramirez and I am the CEO of Pan-American Mental Health services, Inc.

I am also the Chair of the board of Trustees of Aspira Bilingual Charter Schools and Co-Chair of the Latino Behavioral Health Coalition.

Pan-American has been an out-patient provider of behavioral health services for the past 17 years. We offer our services mostly in the Latino Community of North-central Philadelphia.

Most of the services provided are to Spanish speaking people and thus most of our staff is Bilingual/Bicultural.

All of our nonprofessional staff is from and lives in our neighborhoods and are products of our Schools.

Although the hearings today seem to focus on the monitoring of Clinics for licensing and license renewals I wanted to come forth and speak of the experiences that we at Pan-American have had the past years.

We operate in North Central Philadelphia out of two sites, one is located on 4500 block of 5th street and the other one is located at the old Episcopal Hospital Out-patient mental health Clinic at 2561 N. Front Street,

These two sites serve approximately 1,200 people and the 5th street site has waiting lists since we are at full capacity.

We serve every spectrum of North Central Philadelphia, children, youth, adults and elderly people.

Our children suffer the trauma of abuse in every form; the majority of youth served by us are in "special education" if they are in school, which is a nice way of saying, they have behavioral issues.

Adults and the elderly suffer the consequences of abysmal socio-economic conditions. We have just formed and fortified our "Family services Unit" and also provide "faith based" services.

In the midst of this six days a week, day to day we work with CBH at the City level and the State Office of Mental Health and Substance abuse.

Many years ago I was invited to testify before City Council in favor of the creation of CBH by Estelle Richmond. I did so.

As mentioned earlier, I do not speak of the status of other providers or the quality of their services. I speak of ours.

I wish to emphasize to the Committee that we at Pan-American receive several visits a year from both CBH and the State.

Community Behavioral Health works extremely close with us. So close that our Directors and senior staff often complain. We are visited by the NIAC (Network Improvement and accountability Collaborative), often times by "Compliance", we add to that Consumer surveys, which encompasses direct dialogue with our consumers.

Every Monday is continuing education training and seminars, often times by CBH trainers.

In essence we have at a minimum three Community Behavioral Health audit type visits a year.

The Commonwealth Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse does a re-license visit once a year. Everything from our personnel charts (in order to make sure our staff is properly credentialed, legally cleared of any wrong doing that would prohibit them from functioning in a given capacity.

They check for any missing or expired psychiatric licenses. In short they are very thorough as well as meticulous.

They also check like CBH (Community Behavioral Health) consumer records. If some deficiencies are noted, we must send in a "Plan of Corrective Action" within a short time frame.

I have absolutely no knowledge of how other providers fare or the quality of services at these out-patient sites.

Pan-American does not have a 'Drug and Alcohol" license thus we are absolutely not involved in the concern of our neighborhood civic leaders.

We attempt to regulate closely what our psychiatric staff prescribes through our Medical Director.

We do not wish to be "Pill Mills" and I personally react swiftly to any request for information, for a meeting or concern of any leader be them elected or civic.

For us in fact the regulations of the authorities are sometimes too tight than we spend a large amount of agency resources addressing and correcting when we have to.

I believe we do much with little.

We serve a large swath of a population living in the poorest zip codes of the Commonwealth and we do it as "out-patient services". We do not have higher or different "levels of care".

It is estimated by us that probably 65 percent of our residents are on some type of public assistance be it Medicaid, Medicare or SSI.

Yet with our slender resources we are the front line champions of mental health and prevent more than we know the adverse and costly consequences of non-treatment in a neighborhood setting.

We again have no knowledge of the quality of services at other provider locations but we are constantly striving. Evidence of this is the fact that Pan-American Behavioral Health is in the middle of seeking our CARF Accreditation (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities).

We have every intention of continuing our close collaboration and pursuit of excellence with both the City Department of Behavioral Health and State office of mental Health. In this manner we can contribute to offer solutions to the Behavioral Health problems of our Community first outlined and still in existence in the 1994 report titled "Reports of the "Latino Health and Healthcare Improvement Project" published by the Delaware Valley Health Education Foundation.

Thank you all for your attention to these vital matters.