

Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission on Mental Health Law Reform

Fact Sheet

Membership: The 30-member Commission on Mental Health Law Reform was appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia, Leroy Rountree Hassell, Sr., in October, 2006. The Commission is chaired by Professor Richard J. Bonnie, Director of the Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy at the University of Virginia. Commission members include officials from all three branches of state government as well as representatives of many private stakeholder groups, including consumers and their families, service providers, and the bar.

Structure: During 2006-2008, the Commission was assisted by five task forces addressing access to services, involuntary civil commitment, empowerment and self-determination, special needs of children and adolescents, and intersections between the mental health and criminal justice systems. A special working group on health privacy and the commitment process was established in the summer of 2007. During early 2008, four of the original task forces completed their assignments. After the General Assembly enacted a major reform of the commitment laws in 2008, the Commission established three new task forces on implementation of the 2008 commitments reforms, on future commitment reforms and on advance directives. In addition, the Commission reconstituted the original task force on access to services.

Funding: The Commission is an initiative of the Supreme Court of Virginia and is funded by the Supreme Court. The Commission's research is supported by the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services.

Charge: The Commission was directed to conduct a comprehensive examination of Virginia's mental health laws and services and to study ways to use the law more effectively to serve the needs of people with mental illness, while respecting the interests of their families and communities.

Goals of the study include reducing the need for commitment by improving access to mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services, reducing criminalization of people with mental illness, making the process of involuntary treatment more fair and effective, enabling consumers of mental health services to have more choice over the services they receive, and helping young people with mental health problems and their families before these problems spiral out of control.

Product: The Commission issued a preliminary report in December, 2007 which outlined a blueprint for reform and identified specific priorities for consideration by the 2008 session of the General Assembly. The Commission's task force reports and findings from Commission research are posted on the web site as they become available. The Commission will issue progress reports in December 2008 and 2009 and a final report in mid-2010.

For further information, see the Commission's web site at:
<http://www.courts.state.va.us/cmh/home.html>