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Mental health officials seek to stave off county cuts



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Posted: Wednesday, September 2, 2015 5:20 pm



Officials with the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama predict dire consequences for Limestone County's indigent mentally ill if the County Commission decreases its annual allocation.

Representatives from the MHCNCA addressed the commission during its Wednesday work session, and asked commissioners to reconsider their proposal to cut \$25,000 from the agency's annual budget. The commission will vote on the fiscal year 2016 budget on Sept. 21.

"If you can prevent (the mentally ill) from getting into the jails, it would save the county money all the way around and could help prevent a tragedy," said Marie Hood, director of the agency.

Commission Chairman Mark Yarbrough told Hood and Mental Health Officer Bill Giguere that the commission's decision to decrease funding was based on what appeared to be a disproportionate amount being allocated by the county in comparison to other city and county governments.

Information provided to the commission based on data from March 2015 denotes Limestone has allocated \$55,000 to MHCNCA since fiscal years 2010-2011. Meanwhile, other county governments have decreased funding, or in some cases cut funding entirely.

Yarbrough pointed out that the city of Decatur gives MHCNCA no funding, but the agency served 499 people in the city in March 2015. Limestone County, on the other hand, provided \$55,000 but only 120 people were served, according to the figures.

Giguere said those numbers, however, reflect people who have some type of insurance, whether Blue Cross, Medicare or Medicaid. He added only two people in the city of Decatur were served by the MHCNCA because they were admitted to the hospital for mental health issues. He said those patients were deemed indigent because they receive an income of less than \$7,000 per year and had no access to insurance.

Giguere told commissioners that funding received by county and municipal governments is used to help the indigent mentally ill with no access to insurance, and that 67 people in Limestone County received assistance from the agency last year. He said if the county decides to reduce its mental health allocation, MHCNA would be able to help only 32 people in the next fiscal year.

Yarbrough told agency officials their literature was "very, very misleading," and that commissioners would need to see specific dollar amounts on how the county's money is being spent.



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