
LETTER: Legislature should be ashamed of cuts to mental health funding

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State funding for the Department of Mental Health was cut last year. There is insufficient funding to deal with the number of people affected by mental health issues. The number of beds in all the combined state facilities is pathetic. Bryce Hospital is the sole psychiatric care facility in the state for patients who need a hospital setting, excepting the Alzheimer's unit in the old hospital and one other smaller building.

Bryce's large and imposing campus and buildings can house a total of only 267 patients for the entire state. Recently in Pell City and Talladega, two individuals were released from jails where they were being held pending admittance to Bryce but no beds were available.

The facility is also understaffed. On any given night you can phone a ward nurse's desk and ask for a head nurse and be told there is no unit head nurse on the night shift. There is a "floater" between units.

One of the big reasons beds don't become available is due to the lack of transitional housing for patients ready to discharge, so they just stay. Our family has a patient at Bryce whose psychiatrists have said he was ready for discharge in January 2015, but no transitional housing is available so he is still there.

Alabama has about the poorest mental health services in our country. The entire mental health system is bogged down, underfunded and understaffed.

The Legislature should be ashamed of the cuts made in 2016 and shouldn't be cutting taxes if we can't afford to adequately fund mental health services.

