

Mental Health advocates worried about funding for services in Decatur

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DECATUR, Ala. (WHNT) -- Mental Health advocates want help in Decatur.

"We don't have access to mental health care in our community. And we can fix this. It's our town. It's our community," said Julie Collins. She and a group of other concerned citizens and advocates came to the Decatur City Council meeting to ask

for funding to fix the problem.

"We are here to find solutions," said Collins.

Mental Health has been fully funded in the Alabama General Fund. But in Decatur, Collins says it's far from it. It's increasingly more expensive, she says, to get care. And it means longer waits to get appointments. She believes local money would make an impact.

"Local [money] helps fund the sliding fee spots for the local communities," she said, adding that mental health centers "are funded state, federal, county, and local."

The group asked the Decatur City Council to re-fund mental health where city contributions had been cut two years ago. Council members say these concerns aren't lost on them, but mental health isn't the only thing Decatur has had to reduce in recent years.

"We've got a revenue that's sitting flat," said Gary Hammon, Decatur City Council President, "and we've got personnel costs coming up... so you've got a train wreck waiting to happen. So that's why we're doing a lot of creative things right now."

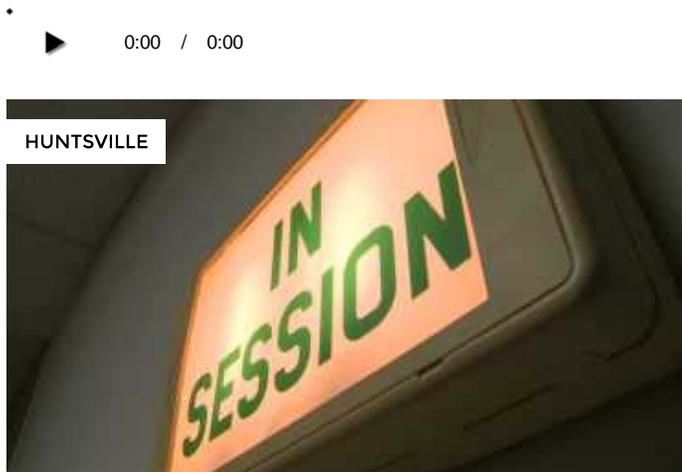
He said funding continues to be tight into Fiscal Year 2016, and the council is going to review a proposal for that budget at their next meeting. It doesn't leave much to spare, he said. Also, council members argue that mental health centers get higher amounts of money from other sources, than what the council had been providing.

Still, they don't plan to put this issue to bed just yet.

"I'm not going to say we're not going to do something on it. I'll have to get some feedback from some of the other council members," he added, saying they could bring it up at the next meeting or work session for discussion.

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