

## Mental Health Client Representative

### REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury received a citizen's complaint #96-45 regarding operation and management of Mental Health Client Representative Program.

### BACKGROUND

A citizen's complaint originally was sent to the District Attorney. The District Attorney's office conducted an investigation in which no criminal charges were made. A report of this investigation was forwarded to the Grand Jury because of allegations pertaining to the Ventura County Mental Health office and Public Guardian which seemed to be appropriate for investigation by the Grand Jury.

### PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

- Interviewed the County Treasurer and Public Guardian.
- Requested an audit of Mental Health by Auditor/Controller.
- Reviewed documents forwarded to Grand Jury chairperson by the Director of Mental Health concerning proposed changes in supported housing funding procedures.
- Met with Auditor/Controller and auditors who completed audit.
- Reviewed completed audit upon receipt.
- Met with Director of Mental Health, and his staff which included Fiscal Officer.

### FINDING

- The Public Guardian is legally responsible for and administers accounts of all persons for whom the court has ordered a conservatorship.
- Under the Public Guardian these individuals may live independently in their own homes, rented or leased apartments, houses, in a Group Home or other residential care facilities.
- The Client Representative Program consists of 10 teams with 12 employees on each team. Eight case managers manage the program.
- An account is established with the client to include a monthly petty cash budget for personal needs. The Public Guardian will pay bills, rent, utilities and phone directly to the vendors.
- The Public Guardian prepares a monthly reconciliation report for the clients. A copy of the reconciliation report is sent to the mental health case manager.
- These accounts are administered in accordance with a protective payment budget plan worked out between clients and their mental health case managers. After the accounts are

approved by the mental health case managers and signed by clients all changes require the writing of and signing of a new plan.

- Public Guardian has not been instructed by Mental Health to flag accounts for collection of loans due the County.
- A client's request for additional/emergency cash must be made in advance to the Public Guardian in writing approved by the Mental Health case manager.
- Auditor-Controller conducts periodic audits of Mental Health but also relies strongly upon State and Federal audits of Mental Health Programs.
- Auditor-Controller began an audit after receipt of the Grand Jury's written request and the results included the following excerpts:
  - a. "Semi-independent Living (SIL) Program. The potential \$140,000 in annual rent revenue for SIL Program was not monitored to identify when rents were due and whether rents were collected. As a result, it was noted that one team site, VCMH should have collected \$16,650 in rent from July 1993 to March 1995, but only \$5,525 was collected. Records were not available to support why the remaining amount was not collected or collection actions taken."
  - b. "Supported Housing Program. Documentation was not available to support the waiver of supported housing repayments. Waivers were generally granted by therapists without further approval. The audit review of 25 disbursement requests disclosed that clients had agreed to repay approximately \$3,400 but only \$428 had been repaid. Although repayments were voluntary, documents were not annotated to identify whether the remaining amount was waived or simply not collected."
  - c. "Representative Payee Account Management. Policies were not established requiring supervisors to review the approximately 240 representative payee accounts to verify that case workers were managing the income expenditures properly. Consequently controls were not in place to readily detect possible inappropriate actions."
- The Public Guardian makes checks to clients upon orders from the Mental Health case worker.
- Mental Health supervisors make ultimate decisions about managing the clients finances.
- Policies were not established that required supervisors to review representative payee accounts and to verify that case workers had managed clients income and expenditures.
- The fiscal officer in Mental Health sends monthly reports to the Mental Health supervisors regarding clients financial status..
- Monthly statements were mailed on accounts that were overdue without assessing collectibility.

## PROGRESS TO DATE

- Mental Health has established written Supported Housing Funding Procedures.
- A policy was established in April 1996 requiring clinic supervisors to periodically review

expenditures from the representative payee accounts.

- Team supervisors review of client account activity from fiscal services is now conducted who address any unusual issues to the care coordinators.
- Team supervisor is given sole authority to write off debt after submitting written request to Chief of Adult Services for review and coordination with fiscal services.
- When a client is transferred to another team, the supported housing repayment responsibility follows the clients file for collection activity in the new team.
- Fiscal staff of Mental Health will be more involved in the clinic site fiscal operations including monitoring of rents due and paid.
- Supported Housing repayment waivers will require management approval and will be monitored by fiscal staff.
- A master calendar has been established to maintain summarized financial records to monitor the financial status of all grants.
- The billing department has implemented procedures to review accounts over one year old on a monthly basis to assess collectibility. If determined uncollectible, a statement will not be sent and the account will be transferred to an inactive file.

#### COMMENDATION

1. The Grand Jury commends the County Auditor-Controller and his staff for their recognition of the Grand Jury's concern and the speed and efficiency of their audit.
2. The Grand Jury commends Mental Health for implementing the procedures suggested by the Auditor-Controller.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury recommends:

1. The newly implemented procedures should be monitored by the Auditor-Controller in six months to assure the procedures are working properly.
2. Mental Health must establish procedures with the Public Guardian to flag accounts to assure immediate collection from clients accounts funds advanced pending receipt of SSI funds (lump sum back payments).
3. The 1996/97 Grand Jury is encouraged to monitor the procedures during their tenure.

#### RESPONSE REQUIRED

Board of Supervisors

Director of Ventura County Mental Health