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**MORE BUDGET CUTS COULD DECIMATE STATE'S MENTAL HEALTH,
ADDICTION TREATMENT SERVICES, ODMHSAS TELLS LAWMAKERS**

Additional cuts to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services could decimate the state's behavioral health care system, reversing years of progress that could take decades to repair, Commissioner Terri White told lawmakers Wednesday.

Speaking to the House Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee on Health, White said thousands of Oklahomans already have been cut off from services after the agency was forced to slash more than \$20 million from this year's budget. Another 10 percent cut beginning in July could result in an additional 8,000 people left without services, more children being placed in foster care, up to 15,000 immediate family members being directly impacted because loved ones are denied services, heavier burdens on law enforcement and massive cost-shifting to the Department of Corrections as more people with untreated mental or addictive disorders enter the criminal justice system.

"The consequences of additional budget cuts would be devastating," White said. "Individual communities, in particular, would be hard-hit as they attempt to help those people whose lives have become shattered because they can't access help for a mental health or substance abuse problem."

White cited information concerning the relationship between untreated mental and addictive disorders, and outcomes in the community such as additional stress on law

enforcement, uncompensated emergency room care, higher suicide rates, more children living in foster care, unemployment and increased incarceration rates.

Nearly every day, White said she hears from individuals and family members who are desperately in need of services; judges, district attorneys, sheriffs and police chiefs who have seen their jobs complicated by cuts to an already struggling system; and hospital administrators who are experiencing ever-increasing demands on their facilities and additional costs of providing services to individuals “who previously would have been able to turn to us for assistance.”

She also addressed recent Oklahoma newspaper headlines that graphically depict the results of unmet mental health and substance abuse treatment needs in communities throughout the state.

“Undoubtedly, these are situations that might have been averted through increased access to care and earlier intervention,” White said. “As access to mental health services falls, the prison population tends to rise. With a 10 percent budget cut, more than 2,600 Oklahomans face an increased risk of incarceration, which amounts to an additional \$50 million annually for the Department of Corrections.”

To deal with budget cuts to date, ODMHSAS already has:

- Cut 28 inpatient beds at Griffin Memorial Hospital, instituting a "census cap" of 120 inpatient beds;
- Reduced state-operated adult residential substance abuse beds by more than 60 in Norman and 20 in Tahlequah;
- Cut approximately 35 children’s mental health beds;
- Closed 24 co-occurring beds in Tulsa;
- Closed a 26-bed enhanced residential treatment center;

- Reduced contracts for all private providers of mental health, substance abuse and prevention services, curtailing access to early intervention and other community based services;
- Initiated budget reductions at state-operated Community Mental Health Centers, resulting in one satellite facility closure, restructuring of services and other reduction measures;
- Reduced the ODMHSAS workforce by over 10 percent through VOBO, RIF and unfilled vacancies.

White said “someone must be able to help the individuals who will no longer be served by the department,” or they will remain in the community – without services – to become more vulnerable to the negative consequences of their untreated illness.

“The reality is that Oklahoma is starting to see, nearly every day now, the heartbreaking and often tragic effects of untreated mental illness and addiction,” she said.

“The consequences and resulting price tag – not only in terms of increased cost to other public resources, but, most importantly, in terms of human suffering and long-term damage to our state – will reverse years of progress that could take decades to repair.

“There is no doubt in my mind that if behavioral health services are cut further, we will see an increase in suicides, crime, more children in foster care, needless deaths, and untold pain and suffering,” she said. “Self-harm attempts, broken relationships, lost jobs, school drop-out rates, child abuse and neglect – these are just a few of the areas we anticipate will escalate. With restricted access to outpatient, community based services, many people will ultimately end up in more expensive settings such as forensic facilities or as uncompensated care in emergency departments.

“The total direct cost to Oklahoma taxpayers when these services are cut will be far greater than the costs of providing access to treatment,” she added.

Legislators also were provided with a breakdown of how cuts will affect Oklahoma as a whole, as well as the impact on legislative districts statewide. To obtain a copy of the report, go to www.odmhsas.org/04-21-10house.htm.

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