

November 1, 2011

The Honorable Steve Ogden
P.O. Box 12068
Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Jim Pitts
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Senator Ogden and Representative Pitts:

On behalf of the _____ Commissioners Court, we extend our thanks for your assistance with the funding effort for NorthSTAR for state fiscal years 2012-2013.

As you know, the NorthSTAR program is a publicly funded managed care approach to the delivery of mental health and chemical dependency services to the eligible residents of Dallas, Ellis, Collin, Hunt, Navarro, Rockwall and Kaufman counties. NorthSTAR is under the direction of the Department of State Health Services. It provides a comprehensive mental health/substance abuse benefit package for all eligible individuals, and access to benefits is determined by clinical need, not funding source.

Since its inception in 1999, NorthSTAR has provided greater access to care, more client choice, better quality of care, and reduced program costs. Unlike other MHMR centers in the State, NorthSTAR has no waiting lists and treats all who seek services.

In 1999, there were 12,000 unique users in the NorthSTAR area; in fiscal year 2011, that number had grown to 73,125. In 1999, the program was funded at approximately \$2,500 per year per client served; in fiscal year 2011, that number had dropped to \$1,534. It is important to note that in areas outside the NorthSTAR region, the average funding per person for fiscal year 2011 was \$3,559.43. The budget for NorthSTAR for fiscal year 2011 was \$124 million; the budget for 2012 has been reduced to \$119 million, with no provision for growth in population in the seven county Area. The 2012 budget does not include \$5.1 million in State Hospital funds which were held back. In short, the funding shortage has stressed the system and we are at a point where adequate services cannot be provided to all who need them.

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The 82nd Legislature made many hard choices to balance the last State budget. The impact of these choices are now being felt by your local constituents. The unintended consequences of the reduced funding for mental health services have resulted in an increase in the number of mentally ill individuals now housed in our county jails as well as the State prison system. We have also experienced an increase in the number of individuals presenting themselves at our local hospital emergency rooms for mental health and chemical dependency treatment. These circumstances have resulted in an increased cost to the taxpayers of Texas.

While NorthSTAR is serving 24.14% of the state-wide population needing such services, it is receiving only 13.17% of the total state-wide funding for such services. We seek your help to restore the State Hospital funding and to secure additional funding for NorthSTAR for the 2012-2013 biennium.

Again, our thanks for your continued support and assistance.

Sincerely,

cc: Hon. Brian Birdwell
Hon. Chris Harris
Hon. Craig Estes
Hon. Florence Shapiro
Hon. John Carona
Hon. Robert Deuell. M.D.
Hon. Royce West
Hon. Angie Button
Hon. Barbara Mallory Caraway
Hon. Byron Cook
Hon. Cindy Burkett
Hon. Dan Branch
Hon. Dan Flynn
Hon. Eric Johnson
Hon. Helen Giddings
Hon. Jerry Madden

Hon. Jim Jackson
Hon. Jodie Laubenberg
Hon. Joe Driver
Hon. Ken Paxton
Hon. Kenneth Sheets
Hon. Lance Gooden
Hon. Linda Harper-Brown
Hon. Rafael Anchia
Hon. Roberto Alonzo
Hon. Rodney Anderson
Hon. Stefani Carter
Hon. Van Taylor
Hon. Will Hartnett
Hon. Yvonne Davis