



February 24, 2021

Hon. John Horgan, MLA

RE: Bill 22

Dear Mr. Horgan:

As an organization, Pathways SMIS has recently taken note of a number of news articles condemning Bill 22 or the involuntary treatment provisions of the Mental Health Act. In opposition to these articles, we are writing to confirm our support for these provisions, both in the Mental Health Act and in any successor legislation.

Pathways is an organization dedicated to helping people with serious mental illness and their families to cope with the effects of serious mental illnesses. The reality of the situation that many families face is that, without involuntary treatment, people with serious mental illness can end up in a vicious cycle where they are unable to appreciate the benefits of treatment without first receiving treatment.

Without being able to treat these patients, treatment providers can either continue to detain the patient in the hopes that, somehow, the patient will come to realize the benefit of treatment or they can release the patient and hope that the patient does not harm themselves or others. This is a very real problem faced in jurisdictions that do not allow for involuntary treatment. In some cases, patients have been detained for months or years because they present a danger to themselves or others but have refused treatment. Detaining someone for years until they consent to treatment is no less coercive than providing treatment involuntarily.

Pathways appreciates the fact that you are aware of this dilemma and that you have listened to the families of people with serious mental illness in your decision to retain the involuntary treatment provisions in mental health treatment legislation.

At Pathways, we believe that many of the criticisms of our mental healthcare system can be addressed without removing the involuntary treatment provisions of the legislation. Addressing stigma is one important measure. Another is adopting a more holistic treatment model for mental health patients and involving their families and communities in their treatment.

We note that the BC Ombudsperson's 2019 report, *Committed to Change: Protecting the Rights of Involuntary Patients under the Mental Health Act*, found that treatment facilities had the worst rate of compliance for the completion of forms allowing patients to nominate a family member to be informed and involved in the patient's care and the forms informing the patient's family members that the patient has been detained under the Mental Health Act. In Pathways' experience, involving family members in a patient's treatment often results in better outcomes for both the patients and the families affected. The first step in this involvement is informing families of the patient's involuntary admission.

Serious mental illness creates problems for patients, their families and their treatment providers for which there are no easy answers. Removing involuntary treatment provisions from mental health legislation may seem like an easy answer, but it does not address the main problem, which is the effect of serious mental illness on the patient's ability to make decisions for their own benefit. When the patient can no longer make those decisions, it is up to their families and their treatment providers to do what they can to help them. It is not a solution to simply imprison patients in healthcare facilities without help or treatment in hopes of a miracle.

Thank you for listening to families.

Pathways is always available to provide its perspective on the impact of serious mental illness and treatment for it. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Don Pavlovich, President

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