



Pataki should sign bills that help mentally ill

First published: Thursday, August 10, 2006

I agree wholeheartedly with your recent editorial calling on the governor to quickly sign legislation banning the inhumane treatment of prison inmates with mental illnesses ("End the cruelty" July 30).

At the same time he is signing into law a bill to end the cruel punishment of prisoners with mental illnesses, he should put his signature on A-2895a (Mental Health Housing Waiting List), which is also about to be sent to him for action. The bill encourages the use of housing with supportive services as an alternative to prison, emergency services, and homelessness for those with mental illnesses. Safe, affordable housing with support services, such as job training and counseling, has been proven to increase the rate of recovery for people with mental illnesses.

The bill calls on the state Office of Mental Health to work with local communities to develop and publish a monthly list of people with mental illnesses who are waiting for housing that meets their needs. It's been more than a decade since a needs assessment has been conducted in this area to gauge our progress and document what works. This law would create a necessary planning tool to meet the basic needs of our mentally ill citizens.

County mental health directors have unanimously endorsed this bill, citing the need for "... access to accurate information on the number of seriously mentally ill adults on waiting lists for specialized housing in their jurisdictions. This legislation is an important step in facilitating the reporting of, compilation of, and dissemination of such information."

Both of these bills would result in common-sense laws that assure people with mental illnesses are treated in the most humane and cost-effective way possible. The governor should sign them both into law.

STEVE COE

Chairman

New York State Campaign

for Mental Health Housing

New York City

steve@communityaccess.org

