Client and Family Leadership Committee (CFLC) Analysis and Recommendations
Re: Accessibility of MHSOAC Meetings for Clients and Family Members
(Revised July 2012)

As described in their 2012 Charter, an activity for the Client and Family Leadership Committee (CFLC) is to "continue deliberation and provide recommendations regarding accessibility of MHSOAC meetings for clients, family members and the public, and promote their effective participation." In considering this task the CFLC has engaged in several discussions about what is meant by "accessibility to MHSOAC meetings". While there was agreement that this charter activity was intended to focus on how to make Commission meetings more physically accessible, there was also an interest in addressing other types of accessibility necessary to promote the effective participation of clients, family members, parents and other members of the public, at Commission meetings. As drafted, this document and the resulting recommendations address findings related to meeting location, principles to be considered in choosing meeting locations, and other essential and desirable provisions necessary to promote the effective participation of clients, family members and other members of the public at Commission meetings.

Findings Related to Choosing a Meeting Space for MHSOAC Meetings

Most recently the majority of MHSOAC meetings have been held at the California Institute for Mental Health (CiMH), located in downtown Sacramento. This meeting facility has several positive attributes that include:

- No cost parking
- Reasonable access by public transportation
- An excellent sound system
- Good access to a market and other low cost food purveyors (within walking distance)
- Convenient to persons already located downtown
- Access to water
- Coffee (provided sometimes)
- Excellent CiMH staff resources

While the CFLC recognizes the benefit of holding meetings at CiMH and considers that it is an acceptable location for Commission meetings, the following accessibility issues have been identified:

- While technically there is wheelchair access – it is very difficult to maneuver a wheelchair within CiMH, both in the lobby area and in the meeting room itself. The size and configuration of the meeting room, with tables and bookshelves around the outside and a middle isle dividing the audience, leaves little room for a person in a wheelchair to move freely anywhere in the room.

- The space for the audience is fairly confined and can be a barrier for those not at ease in crowded spaces. Other than leaving the meeting room, there is no place for persons to stretch their legs or move slightly away from the crowd if they desire.

Based on these findings, the CFLC has identified seven principles to be considered when choosing locations for MHSOAC meetings. The CFLC acknowledges that CiMH generally meets all of the principles cited with the exception of No. 6 and 7, having to do with adequate space for easy wheelchair access and larger meeting room space.

Principles to be Considered When Choosing MHSOAC Meeting Locations

1. Convenient, low to no-cost parking
2. Easy access to public transportation
3. Easy access to a market and/or low cost food purveyors (accessibility by foot is preferred)
4. Excellent sound system that includes ability for interested parties to listen and clearly hear the meeting
5. Easy availability of water
6. Wheelchair access that provides enough space for a person in a wheelchair to maneuver easily:
    - outside the main meeting space
    - within the meeting room
    - in the space where meeting resource materials are available
7. Meeting room space that provides both space for the seated audience and for persons to remain in the room, move about, and stretch their legs

Other Essential and/or Desirable Meeting Provisions

Beyond meeting location, another essential provision that enables clients and family members to attend Commission meetings, is the availability of a stipend or reimbursement for child or dependent care. For many clients, family members, parents and caregivers, their ability to attend a Commission meeting hinges on whether or not they have a way to pay for child care or dependent care. Currently, the Commission includes reimbursement provisions intended for child care, for a client or family member who is a parent of a minor child, and meets the identified contract criteria in the Commission's stakeholder contracts such as those with United Advocates for Children (UACF) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). As cited later in this report, the CFLC recommends that: (1) the contract provisions included in the Commission's stakeholder contracts be expanded to include a reimbursement provision for dependent care; and (2) that the Commission support efforts to inform clients, family members, parents and caregivers about the availability of these reimbursements.

Another essential provision that supports the effective participation of clients and family members at Commission meetings, is the timely availability and accessibility of meeting materials produced for Commission meetings. This would require making meeting materials available as early as possible prior to meetings.

The CFLC suggests the MHSOAC should consider additional ways to expand access to and participation at MHSOAC meetings including:

- Archive recordings of MHSOAC meetings and make available to the public
- Stream MHSOAC meetings
- Provide outreach to persons from the hard-of-hearing community to promote their attendance and participation at MHSOAC meetings. Provide American Sign Language interpreters at meetings as well.
- Provide outreach to other disabled communities to promote their attendance and participation at MHSOAC meetings

Recommendations:

1. The Commission adopts the CFLC "Principles to be Considered When Choosing MHSOAC Meeting Locations."

2. The Commission will ensure that its contracts with stakeholder organizations include reimbursement provisions for both child care and dependent care.

3. The Commission will support efforts to better inform clients, family members, parents and caregivers about the availability of reimbursement for child care and dependent care when needed to attend a Commission meeting.

4. The Commission will endeavor to make Commission meeting materials available and accessible as early as possible.