

REMHDCO

Racial & Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition

October 7, 2009

Andrew Poat
Chairman
Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
1300 17th Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Public Comment at MHSOAC Meetings

Dear Chairman Poat,

REMHDCO would like to commend and support the work by the Client and Family Leadership Committee on Improving the Effectiveness of Public Comment at MHSOAC Meetings. The initial report was presented at the MHSOAC meeting of September 24th, 2009 and it is our understanding that a vote may be taken at the meeting of October 22nd.

There is only one recommendation that we wish to amend and that is the time allotted per Speaker/Public Comment. **REMHDCO supports a maximum of three minutes per speaker**, as is the current practice of the Commission.

Upon review of the research presented by the OAC staff, out of the nine similar commissions surveyed, five allowed speakers 3-5 minutes, two did not specify a time limit, and only one allowed a maximum of 2-3 minutes. We believe the MHSOAC should model itself on the majority of these examples.

Of course, under circumstances when many people (i.e. over 10) want to comment on an item, it is reasonable for the Chairman to use his discretion and limit public comment to less than three minutes. Members of REMHDCO have been present at OAC meetings over the past two years and rarely remember a time when there have been more than 5 or 6 people wanting to comment.

REMHDCO also supports the recommendation of having two general public comment periods, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. It has been our observation that by the end of the OAC meeting when the current public comment period takes place, there are many Commissioners that have already gone. Stakeholders who may have traveled a long distance and may have been waiting a long time then present their heartfelt testimony to the few remaining Commissioners.

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As so aptly outlined as the "Issue" in last month's OAC materials: *Public comment is an essential component in all MHSOAC meetings. In order for the MHSOAC to make informed decisions in the best interest of the people they serve, members of the public that attend meetings must feel that certain core values are in place. These values are respect, equality and transparency.*

Thank you for consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beatrice Lee". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small flourish at the end of the name.

Beatrice Lee
President