



# Making Your Point:

## *How to Give Effective Public Comment at MHSOAC Meetings*

Client & Family Leadership Committee



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## How Did We Get Here?



A little history:

- The voters of California approved **Proposition 63** in November 2004 and the law, officially enacted as the **Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)**, became effective on January 1, 2005
- Part of the law also created the **Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC)**
- MHSA provides funding for new and expanded mental health services and supports

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## The Spirit of the MHSA



- Consumer-Centered (Person-Directed), Family-Focused systems of care
- Culturally competent, relevant and effective
- Mental Health informed by **recovery**
  
- **MHSA Values:**
  - Community Collaboration
  - Client and Family Driven
  - Cultural Competence
  - Wellness, Recovery and Resilience Focused
  - Integrated Service Experiences
  - Co-Occurring Disorders Competence

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## What is the Mission of the MHSOAC?



To provide: the vision and leadership, *in collaboration with clients, their family members and underserved communities*, to ensure an enhanced continuum of care ... by:

- Holding public systems accountable
- Providing oversight
- Eliminating disparities
- Promoting mental wellness
- Supporting recovery and resiliency resulting in positive outcomes in California's community based mental health system.

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## Where do “*WE*” Come In?

The MHSOAC must ensure that the perspective and participation of members and others suffering from severe mental illness and their family members is a significant factor in all of its decisions and recommendations.



## That means you!



- Your knowledge, opinions and wisdom are valuable because:
- The Commission needs *your* input in order to do its job!

## Introduction to Public Comment

There are two types of Public Comment taken during MHSOAC meetings:



- Public Comment on an *Agenda Item*, and
- *General* Public Comment

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## Public Comment on an *Agenda Item*

- Takes place following a presentation and discussion on an item
- Takes place when the Commission will vote on the item that day or at the next month's meeting



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## General Public Comment

Usually takes place twice during the course of a meeting:

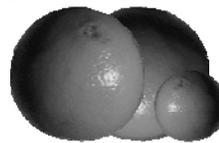
- At the end of the morning session, before the Commission breaks for lunch
- At the end of the meeting, before the meeting is adjourned



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## The First Steps

- Once you get to the meeting, get a copy of the Agenda
- Scan the Agenda to get an idea of what will be discussed that day
- If you see an Agenda item that you want to give input on,
- Fill out a ***Public Comment Card*** (*orange colored paper*)



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# The Public Comment Card

## PUBLIC COMMENT CARD

NAME: Susan B. Anthony DATE: 2/21/2011

### AGENDA ITEM/ TAB

SECTION: Public Comment at Commission Meetings

Organization (if applicable) Blizzard County Client & Family Network

Mail  E-mail susanb7000@clientfamily.org

Phone ( 111 ) 222-3344

555 N. Blizzard Ave. #66

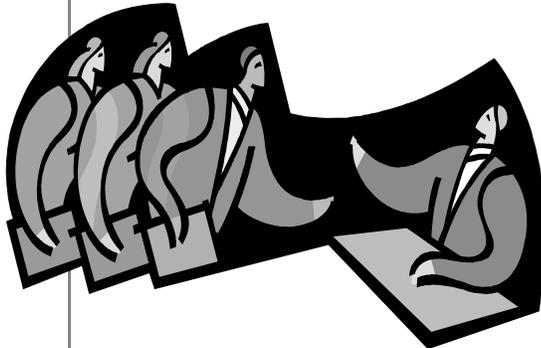
No. Street Apt/Suite

Blizzard City CA 77889

City State ZIP Code

## Public Comment on an *Agenda Item*

- Turn in your **Public Comment Card** to a Commission staff person *before* the start of the presentation or discussion of the Agenda item you wish to speak about



## Things to consider...

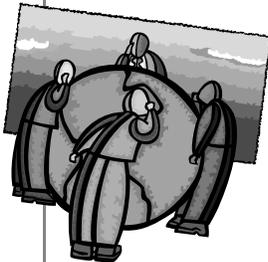
- If it's an agenda item, read the description of the item in the agenda
- Look over any other materials on that topic that may be made available at the meeting
- Talk to others and ask questions!



## Things to consider...

### **Listen** to others:

- The issues you care about may be the focus of a presentation or a discussion involving Commissioners, Commission staff, representatives of certain organizations and other members of the public



## Remember: The “Clock will be Ticking!”

- You will typically have **THREE MINUTES** to make your comments
- The Commission Chair has the power to shorten that time, especially if there are many people who want to speak on an issue
- Depending on how much you want to say, and *how prepared you are*, three minutes can seem like three seconds or an eternity!



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## Basic Composition

Think of your comments as having **three parts:**



- A beginning (or introduction)
  - A middle (supporting evidence), and
  - An end, or conclusion

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## "In the Beginning ..."

- A brief **self-introduction**: "Hello Commissioners, my name is Shirley Lopez and I am from Blizzard County."
- Any **relevant affiliations**: "I am also a member of *Peers and Families for Change*," or "I work as a counselor at Blizzard County Consumer Services."



## Introducing Your Topic



- If you are speaking during a General Public Comment section, you will have to introduce the topic ("I want to remind the Commissioners about the importance of holding your meetings at accessible locations...")
- If you are speaking about an Agenda item, people will know the general topic ("I feel the Commission should vote to review MHSA-funded programs in Blizzard County.")

## The Middle (supporting evidence)

This is the “meat” of your statement:

- What do you want the Commissioners to know
- Are you for or against something?
- Why?
- Give you best two or three reasons



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## *Remember* what others have said before you.

- If you **agree** with what someone else has said, you can say so (making clear which point you agree with) and then explain why or bring up another point related to that item
- If you **disagree**, do so *respectfully*, noting your points of agreement and disagreement without attacking anyone



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## Give it a Personal Touch!

- Being able to speak from **personal experience** can make your comments more powerful.
- You don't want to make it "all about yourself," but letting the Commissioners know that an issue affects or has affected your life gives that issue a "human face."



## *Experience = Expertise*

- Remember that no one expects you to know or be an expert about **everything** about your topic!
  - Focus on what you know, your own experience and your own point of view.
- It's **your** perspective that the Commissioners need to hear!



## Your Conclusion (strong and polite)

- When you have finished going over your main points, it's effective to sum up with a simple, one sentence statement ("For all of these reasons, I urge the Commissioners to vote "no" on the proposed policy changes. Thank you for your time.")



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## You Are Not Alone!

- If you have questions or want some assistance, both Commission staff and **Public Participation Assistants** are available to help you



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## Public Participation Assistants

**Public Participation Assistants** are volunteer members of the Commission's *Client & Family Leadership Committee* who can help you with the public comment process - from filling out the Public Comment Card to going over your notes or planned comments with you



## Knowledge is POWER!

The more you know about the *Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission*, the better you will be able to participate in its activities



To learn more, visit:

<http://www.dmh.ca.gov/MHSOAC/default.asp>

## Get Involved!



- By the time an issue reaches the Commission, many conversations already have taken place and many decisions made, so ...
- ... *Get involved* in your local stakeholder processes and get to know the consumer, family member and parent organizations that care about the same issues that you do!

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## Thank You!



Public Participation Assistants are ready to help!

Website: [www.dmh.ca.gov/MHSOAC](http://www.dmh.ca.gov/MHSOAC)

- To request to be put on MHSOAC listserv, make request using website address above, or, contact Matt Lieberman at (916) 445-8783

