Making Your Point:

How to Give Effective Public Comment at MHSOAC Meetings

Client & Family Leadership Committee

MHSOAC
Mental Health Services
Oversight & Accountability Commission

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
- MHSA provides funding for new and expanded mental health services and supports
- Part of the law also created the ***Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC)***

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

What is the Mission of the MHSOAC?

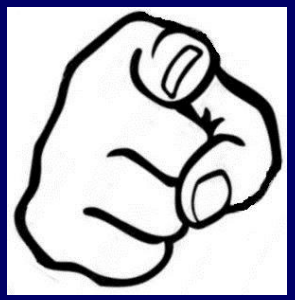
To provide: the vision and leadership, *in collaboration with clients, their family members and underserved communities*, to ensure an enhanced continuum of care … by:

- 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.

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

- A Public Comment period is designed to allow you to get your input – briefly stated – into the public record. However, it is not the time for you to engage in conversation with the Commissioners (unless they ask you questions, which you can then answer)
  - There are <u>two</u> types of Public Comment taken during MHSOAC meetings:

    <u>Public Comment on an *Agenda Item*,</u>

    and

    <u>*General* Public Comment</u>

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

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

The First Steps

- At the meeting, pick up a copy of the **Meeting Packet** (that day's Agenda will be on the first page of the packet)
- 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*** (it's on orange-colored paper!)

The Public Comment Card

PUBLIC COMMENT CARD

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

AGENDA ITEM: 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

The Public Comment Card

(It's easier than it looks …)

Remember:

- All we ***really*** need you to fill in on the card is your **name** and the **agenda item/tab #** or **topic** you wish to address;
- All the other info, such as your contact information, is ***OPTIONAL.***
- If you wish to speak during the **General Public Comment** segment, indicate this by writing *"General"* or *"General Public Comment"* on the "Agenda Item" line.

Public Comment on an *Agenda Item*

- Turn in your **Public Comment Card** to the Commission staff table *before* the start of the public comment section on the Agenda item you wish to speak about

Get some background

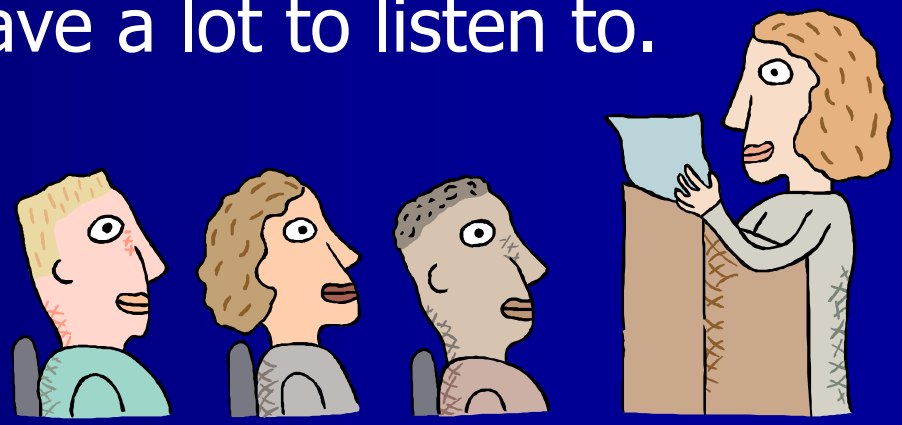
- If it's an agenda item, read the description of the item in the agenda
- Look over any other materials on that topic that may be made available at the meeting
- Talk to others and ask questions!
- You can take notes or jot your ideas down

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

Know your audience!

Commissioners are people, too. Meetings can be long, and they have a lot to listen to. Simple things can help to make your remarks more memorable:



- Make eye contact as you speak
- Use a conversational tone; don't "preach"
- Be to-the-point (You have ***<u>three minutes</u>***!)
- Give examples

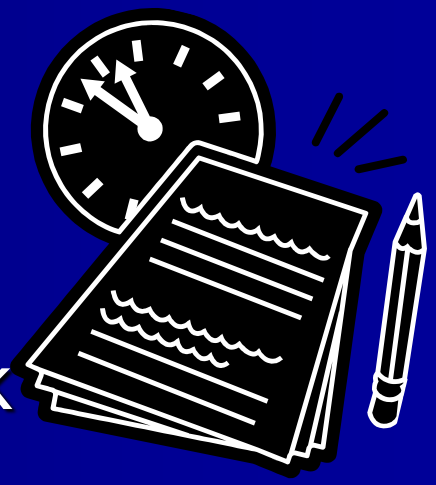
Be Positive!

Don't just focus on the problems at hand. Be prepared to suggest and support ***solutions***!

Your idea, your expertise, your story or your insight might be the missing piece of the puzzle!

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!

Basic Composition

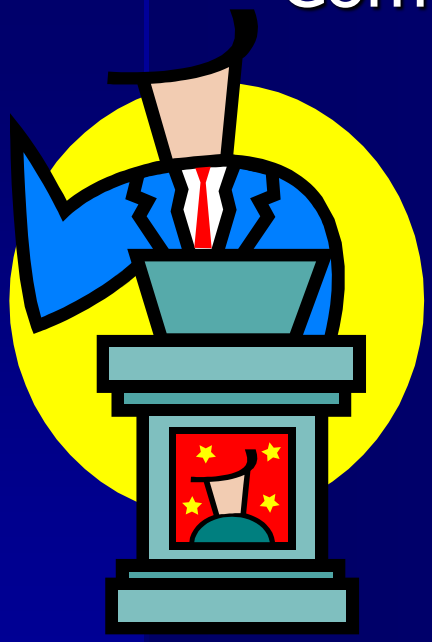
Think of your comments as having **three parts:**

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

“In the Beginning …”

- A brief **self-introduction**: “Hello Commissioners, my name is Shirley Lopez and I am from Blizzard County.”
- Any **<u>relevant</u> 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 your best two or three reasons

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

To repeat or not to repeat

Sometimes, when many people speak on an item, the points you were planning to make may be made by others.

As an advocate, you have to judge whether repeating the same points will be effective.

One strategy is to make the same point, but in your own, unique way, perhaps drawing on your personal experience with the subject being discussed. This is called “repeat with variation.”

You can also “opt out”

You also have the option of simply telling the Commissioners that you agree with what was said earlier, or can simply say “**Pass!**” when your name is called.

Remember, you can always “pass” for whatever reason, if you decide not to speak.

It is ***your*** choice!

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.")

You Are Not Alone!

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

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. Know the interests and authority of the body you'll be addressing.

To learn more, visit:

http://www.mhsoac.ca.gov

(Commission meeting agendas are posted 10 days before the meeting!)

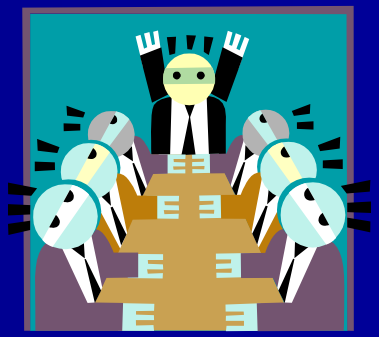
Get involved!

While Public Comment periods at Commission meetings allow only for brief input -- not dialogue -- other avenues for greater input exist through the MHSOAC's committees:

- ***Client & Family Leadership*** Committee
- ***Cultural & Linguistic Competence*** Committee
- ***Evaluation*** Committee
- ***Financial Oversight*** Committee
- ***MHSOAC Services*** Committee

MHSOAC Committees

All Committee meetings are open to the public, and include opportunities for Public Comment as well as dialogue with Committee members.



Committee membership rosters, meeting schedules and locations, membership applications and charters are available at:

www.mhsoac.ca.gov/Committees/Committees.aspx

Act locally!

- By the time an issue reaches the Commission and its Committees, 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!

How YOU can help us:

Nothing in this presentation is a standard that you have to meet, just tips from people with some experience in making public comments.

You have experiences of your own, and may have some tips to share with us!

We welcome your input and suggestions.

Thank You!

Public Participation Assistants are ready to help!

Website: **http://www.mhsoac.ca.gov**

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