

Public Hearing: Mental Health & Wellness Commission – April 23rd, 2013

Public Comment: Jim Casha, 207 North St East, P.O. Box 308, Norwich, On, Canada, N0J 1P0,
540-717-9240

Re: The need to include issues related to fetal alcohol exposure in the scope of the report

Lt. Gov. Calley and Commission Members:

Fetal alcohol exposure is the number one cause of cognitive disabilities in North America.

I am here today to beg this Commission to include, in detail, the needs of individuals affected with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) in the scope of this report. There also needs to be an agency tasked with coordinating the services of DHS, the MDCH and the MDOC for individuals affected with FASD.

Senator Moolenaar's proposed Community Health Budget for 2013-2014 (SB 198, Sec. 502) includes new boilerplate language directing the Department of Community Health to develop an outreach program with an April 1 report on efforts to combat fetal alcohol syndrome. This is a first step in combating this tragic, but preventable, disability - but we need much more - including funding.

It has been 40 years since the first child in Michigan was diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). The incident rate of children affected with an FASD has increased over the 40 years from 1 in 100 to 3 in 100 with rates up to 16 times higher than that in poor communities.

Forty-one years ago my parents fostered, and later adopted, two of Michigan's foster children from the Cass Corridor in Detroit. I have been dealing with the ramifications of that kind act ever since. I'm tired and I need some help. There are many others who need help as well. Seventy-five percent of foster children are affected with a FASD. Sixty-percent of those children will end up incarcerated.

Fetal alcohol exposure is the 'root cause' of many of our social problems and - it keeps people in poverty. It keeps people in need of services -for life.

Children with FASD often grow up with social and emotional problems. They may have mental illness or substance abuse problems, struggle in school, and become involved with the corrections system. Costs of FAS alone are estimated at between 1 and 5 million dollars per child, not including incarceration. This estimate does not include cost to society, such as lost productivity, burden on families, and poor quality of life.

(Kellerman,C. and Kellerman,T., 1999. The five million dollar baby: The economics of FAS)

In the worst cases - they become mass school shooters (see the book The Fatal Link). At last week's Senate Judiciary Committee Meeting; a representative of the Humane Society made the link between children who abuse animals and mass school shooters - there were seven 'links'. While this is likely true - the real 'link' is that innocent, vulnerable, children whose brains are permanently damaged from prenatal exposure to alcohol sometimes become animal abusers and then mass school shooters. The 'root cause' is fetal alcohol exposure.

On February 28th, I gave public comment in front of Sen Moolenaar's Subcommittee on the need for help for individuals affected with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). After my comment, Sen Molenaar, questioned the Department about what is being done to combat fetal alcohol exposure. Their answer was essentially - not much. We need to take immediate action - and some money in the 2013-2014 budget would allow the State to start implementing some of the programs that other states have used to lower the incident rate by 25%. At a cost of 1 to 5 million dollars per child *plus incarceration costs*, a 25% reduction will save the state billions in future liability payments.

In addition, I would like to be considered as a member of a workgroup or committee to research and develop recommendations for care and treatment of individuals affected with FASD.

Pressing on, with (a lot of) unwavering faith,



Jim Casha