



**Joint Finance Committee Testimony
Presented by Thomas Cook on the
Governor's FY 2020 Recommended Budget for the
Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health
February 21, 2019**

Hello again, Representative Johnson, Senator McDowell, Director Jackson, and Secretary Walker. Good afternoon to Division Director Romero and citizens of the First State. My name is Thomas Cook. I am the Executive Director of the Ability Network of Delaware, a statewide association that includes 12 organizations that provide treatment for mental health and substance use disorders.

We support the provisions in the governor's recommended budget for DSAMH again this year. Similar to the efforts that our association made in previous years to obtain budget language to require a market study to identify the funding shortfall that exists for services to adults with I/DD, we are also proposing that the Joint Finance Committee adopt a provision in the FY 2020 budget for a market study to identify the true costs of providing treatment for people with mental health and substance use disorders.

Last week, we received support for our proposal from the Pew Charitable Trust, which released eight recommendations for improving substance use disorder treatment in Delaware. They included a recommendation that the "General Assembly ... consider directing Medicaid and the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health to fund reimbursement for care coordination for substance use disorder treatment with a rate comparable to surrounding states and informed by evidence of the full cost of such services."

In September 2018, we made Secretary Walker, Director Romero, and Director Groff aware that organizations that provide behavioral health services had developed serious payment

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issues, with over \$15 million in accounts receivable. In a system of services that Secretary Walker has acknowledged is underfunded – a system that is battling an opioid epidemic while attempting to keep services going for other substance use and mental health disorders – delays and denials of payment for services are unacceptable. DSAMH has convened a Provider / DMMA / DSAMH work group that we hope will begin to resolve specific provider billing issues. The payment work group had its first meeting earlier this month and will be meeting on a monthly basis. We would like to see DSAMH and DMMA approach the payment issues with a bit more urgency, as providers have been raising red flags about these issues for more than a year now.

If payments are not adequate to cover the cost of services and if they are not made on a timely basis, the continuity and stability of behavioral health services will be threatened and the toll of the opioid epidemic will continue to rise. You'll hear more about our proposals to address the adequacy and timeliness of payments for these services, because they are two of the four issues that demand "simple (legislative) solutions" that we will be presenting to the General Assembly throughout this year's legislative session. Our members are in the business of helping people recover from mental health and substance use disorders – they need the support of this Committee and the General Assembly to do this work.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.