

**HAMILTON COUNTY  
TAX LEVY REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Hamilton County, Ohio, Board of Commissioners  
Hon. Denise Driehaus, President  
Hon. Stephanie Summerow Dumas, Vice President  
Hon. Todd Portune

**Re: The Family Services and Treatment Levy**

Dear Commissioners:

The mission of the Tax Levy Review Committee, prior to the placement of a Hamilton County tax levy on the ballot, is to review the request and advise the Commissioners. To accomplish the review of the Family Services and Treatment Levy (FST), Chairman Gwen McFarlin appointed a sub-committee consisting of Edward Herzig, chair, Jeanette Hargreaves, Bob Furnier and Mark Quarry. The FST provides important and necessary funding for the citizens of Hamilton County who have medical and mental health issues that contribute to criminal activity.

The Public Consulting Group (PCG) was contracted to perform an in-depth review of the agencies that receive Tax Levy funding. This review includes:

- A) Overview of all treatment services provided within the County criminal justice system and the available funding sources.
- B) Development of a map of treatment services provided within the Hamilton County criminal justice system.
- C) Operational analysis of each treatment program, including benchmarking of performance against similar programs both in Ohio and nationally.
- D) Financial analysis of each treatment program, including benchmarking of costs against similar programs both in Ohio and nationally.
- E) Recommendations for treatment programming best practices, costs savings and/or revenue enhancements.
- F) Financial and operational evaluation of requested new FST Levy funded services.

The report from PCG is attached and is part of this letter. The Sequential Intercept Map, also an attachment to this letter, shows the relationships between the various agencies and associated FST funding in graphic form. The primary purpose of the levy is to provide treatment for individuals in the criminal justice system related to their alcohol and drug use. Most clients are deemed to have low security risk and enter these programs voluntarily. The details of who would qualify are described in the attached report from the consultants. As pointed out by PCG, nearly 99% of the FST funds are for treatment-based programs. It must be noted that, since the passage of the last levy, there has been a marked increase in opiate use and opiate-related deaths in Hamilton County. Most of the programs are under the auspices of the Hamilton County Sheriff, Hamilton County Municipal and Common Pleas Courts and the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board (MHR SB). Talbert House is contracted to provide the majority of the services.

The programs are well described in the PCG report. Significantly less funding is devoted to prevention. A new program, Community Alternative Sentencing Center (CASC), will replace the 6-, 10-, and 20-day DUI Turning Point Program. The funding for CASC is not part of this levy.

The review did not reveal any non-compliance with or misuse of levy funds. However, a review of agencies' overall performances and a comparison across agencies were hampered by weaknesses in data collection and inconsistent metrics. As an example, different definitions of recidivism are used across agencies, and agencies are prohibited access to some information required for calculating recidivism. Similarly, aspects of contract administration can be improved and streamlined.

Listed here are nine specific recommendations made by PCG with responses from Talbert House and the MHR SB:

- 1. Maximize Federal revenue opportunities.** Both Talbert House and MHR SB agree that this is important. They have been and are currently pursuing and obtaining grants.
- 2. Require detailed budgets and expenditure tracking to better understand how levy funds are specifically utilized. In addition, invoices should be submitted in a timelier manner.** Talbert House in general agrees and has added two full-time positions to address this. One of the issues is that Medicaid allows vendors 365 days to submit bills. Thus, the final accounting for any year is delayed. The State of Ohio would need to make a change in the rules governing Medicaid to address this.
- 3. Streamline contracting processes and payment structures.** Two options are presented for the Commissioners to consider: (1) Increase oversight and accountability in current system, or (2) have Mental Health Recovery Service Board administer the contract. In addition, the contractual amendment for 1617 Reading Road and Turning Point includes a per diem rate for utilized beds should be followed. Talbert House would prefer option 2.
- 4. Develop a uniform definition of recidivism as defined by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections.** This definition should be part of all contracts and used by all entities that receive funding from the FST Levy.
- 5. Enhance data collection and develop and collect performance measures.** It is necessary to know the demographic details of the population receiving services. As examples, understanding how many non-Hamilton County residents participate in Levy funded programs and the racial and gender breakdown of those receiving services would help ensure that Levy funded programs are deployed appropriately.
- 6. Invest in data interoperability including jail-based demographic data, client identification, Municipal Court referrals etc.** The current system at the Jail is outdated and cumbersome and includes manual and paper-based components. These shortcomings

came to light during the effort to collect data for this report. Although the resolution of this issue is not part of the FST Levy review, the TLRC is raising the issue because it impacts its ability to provide a comprehensive report.

**7. Increase treatment bed and detoxification capacity.** This is especially needed because of the increase in opiate use. Two options are mentioned: (1) operationally combine 1617 Reading and Turning Point, and/or (2) use Turning Point as a residential detoxification center. Talbert House responds that alcohol detoxification must be done by professionals in a safe setting (i.e. a hospital or clinic) and is significantly more expensive. Currently Medical Assisted Treatment is available for opiates.

**8. Evaluate FST Levy revenue allocation as new programs are proposed and initiated such as PreventionFIRST.** The old adage that an “ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is apt. The return on investment, as noted in the report, is very large and may save significant dollars. Talbert House comments that it has pledged to raise wages since the current pay structure is lower than the average pay for the same position. This is noted in the report.

**9. Identify individuals eligible for sentencing alternatives based upon risk assessment.** This is one of the purposes of CASC that will launch later this year.

**The TLRC recommends that the Levy be renewed at its current millage of 0.34. Additionally, the TLRC strongly supports Recommendation 8 suggesting that programs that are preventive have an increase in allocated funds. Accordingly, PCG, based on a request from the TLRC, has increased the recommended funding for PreventionFIRST. The TLRC also supports Recommendations 1,2 4, 5 and 6. The CASC program is a solution for Recommendation 9. Regarding Recommendation 7, the TLRC does not take a position as the determination of detoxification locations is better left to those with expertise in the field..**

The programs funded by the Levy provide a significant benefit for the citizens of Hamilton County. The breadth and depth of the programs that are available is truly commendable. These programs are needed more than ever. We trust that this report and its recommendations are helpful to the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners in their considerations. We appreciate the opportunity to be of service.

Sincerely,

FST subcommittee of the TLRC  
Edward B. Herzig MD, chair  
Jeanette Hargreaves  
Bob Furnier  
Mark Quarry