

September 14, 2007

The Honorable Ruth Ann Minner
Governor
Tatnall Building
William Penn Street
Dover, Delaware 19901

**re: Delaware Psychiatric Center and leadership of
Department of Health & Social Services**

Dear Governor Minner,

We write to express to you our strong and considered conclusion that it is time for Vince Meconi to resign or be removed from the position of Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS).

During the past weeks and months of allegations, responses and explanations about disturbing events at the Delaware Psychiatric Center, we have sought the facts and waited to hear from Secretary Meconi at the Public Hearing of the Task Force on September 11, 2007 and again on September 13, 2007. We withheld judgment because we felt it important to give the Secretary the opportunity to rebut the various and varied allegations made regarding the Delaware Psychiatric Center. Unfortunately, Sec. Meconi's explanations fell far short of convincing us that things are on track to get better.

We ask that you will immediately offer Sec. Meconi the option to resign, encourage him to do so, and if he chooses not to do that, then you should exercise your Executive prerogative to remove and replace him.

It is notable that at the time when Secretary Meconi was appointed Secretary of the Department of Health & Social Services in 2001, the Senate Republican leadership seriously questioned his background, qualifications and fitness to head the DHSS.

At the Senate Executive Committee Hearings on January 18, 2001, Senator Sorenson pursued a line of questioning about Mr. Meconi's lack of background and experience. Senator Sorenson asked Mr. Meconi if he had policy, program or management experience in the fields of any of the Divisions included under DHSS: Public Health, Aging, Mental Health, Social Services, Alcohol & Drug Abuse, Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Long Term Care, Cancer, State Service Centers, Rehabilitative Services, Child Care etc. Mr. Meconi acknowledged that he had no experience in any of those areas, saying "I think it's clear that I do not have experience in either Health or Social Services".

Senator Sorenson's grave concerns six years ago have proven to be prescient. Recent allegations of abuse and mismanagement at the Delaware Psychiatric Center are most disturbing. DHSS management's response to these incidents has been inept, arrogant and potentially deceitful.

Senators Copeland and Sorenson attended the September 11, 2007 hearing at the Carvel State Building to listen to Sec. Meconi's defense and explanation of the actions of his staff at DPC. Regrettably, his responses seemed intended to hide facts and confuse the audience rather than instill confidence that he had the problems under control.

Some specific areas of concern from the September 11 and September 13 testimony are:

- The explanation for the significant overtime hours worked by attendants at DPC lacked credibility.
- The description of the PM-46 investigation process demonstrated a clear ability to hide, alter, or even dispose of PM-46 reports due to the poor document control procedures.
- The obvious attempts to avoid sending all PM-46 investigative reports to the Patient Advocate.
- The lack of clear guidance and follow-through relating to initiating a criminal investigation with the Delaware State Police.
- The failure of DPC management to take the issue of staff intimidation seriously and giving the impression of actually stifling employee openness.
- The confused testimony over the shredding of investigative files at DPC.

We know that psychiatric hospitals are difficult places to operate. But the above issues combined with the numerous patient and staff allegations demonstrate a lack of leadership and credibility that requires a change in personnel to re-instill public trust in the operation of DHSS. We did not rush to judgment, despite the obvious management missteps by DHSS in recent weeks. We waited to hear Secretary Meconi's explanation of these events at the public hearing on September 11, and they were woefully inadequate. It is now very clear that a change in management at DHSS is imperative.

We urge you to make that happen as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Charles L. Copeland, Senate Minority Leader



Liane M. Sorenson, Senate Minority Whip



Steven H. Amick, Senator 10th District



John C. Still, Senator 17th District



F. Gary Simpson, Senator 18th District