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NEWS RELEASE

Prisoner advocates cautiously optimistic on prison healthcare change.

Based on communications with Correct Care Solutions (CCS) transitional team, Kim Christie and Jon Bosch, the Co-Coordinator of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC), Jim Bergin and Judy Garvey, are expressing cautious optimism of improved medical care for Maine's prisoners beginning July 1.

"Being sentenced to a Maine prison has too often meant substandard medical care. No matter the reason for incarceration, Maine's men and women must start receiving a better quality of medical care than they have in the past," says Jim Bergin of Blue Hill.

The Legislature's Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability's (OPEGA) report on health care services for Maine's prisoners, released earlier this year, found problems from the soon-to-be-replaced provider, Corizon, in treatment, medication accountability, and "deficiencies in contractor compliance with MDOC health care policies and adherence to professional standards."

Based on the level of serious problems found by OPEGA, and the need for better accountability and budgeting, the Department of Correction has contracted with CCS, a private medical care provider, to replace Corizon on July 1.

In recent weeks, M-PAC members were invited to submit recommendations to CCS and Melissa Grondin, Associate Commissioner, MDOC, from advocates, prisoners, and their families to improve medical staffing and healthcare operations. In addition, Grondin is setting up a meeting for representative prisoners to share recommendations and concerns with CCS.

“We’re pleased that CCS will soon be meeting with their Inmate clients to learn the actual pros and cons of the current system and staffing,” said Judy Garvey of Blue Hill. “To our knowledge, this level of access and openness to input from patients has never happened in Maine’s prisons. In M-PAC’s opinion, this represents the push toward transparency and accountability initiated by Commissioner Ponte.”

M-PAC members held a statewide meeting June 9 in Manchester to discuss Maine prisoners’ chronic and immediate health needs. Members and attendees presented recent examples of medical problems and Coordinators shared the list of recommendations given to CCS.

“Corizon’s level of care has continued to be very inadequate. Incarcerated Mainers are vulnerable people who have nowhere to turn for medical choices,” says Bergin. “And with required standards met – what we hope will happen beginning July 1 – the MDOC will begin to experience reductions in its medical care budget, saving money for all Maine taxpayers.”

Bergin says, “Treating, rather than ignoring, ailments, in addition to providing preventive care, such as dental exams and diabetes management, would result in large savings on chronic and emergency medical needs from serious health deterioration later.”

At the Legislative hearing on OPEGA’s report, one family member spoke of his incarcerated brother whose intestinal problems, exacerbated by medical negligence, according to the family, resulted in an avoidable colostomy. Had this young inmate been

treated properly early on, said the family, he would not be “wearing a bag” for the rest of his life, nor, states Garvey, “Would the MDOC have spent great sums of money in remedying what could have easily been avoided through good medical practices.”

Though M-PAC is hopeful about raising the standards of required medical care for Maine’s prisoners, advocates view CCS as an untested provider. “We know they will be letting some staff go, and others will be on a 90-day probationary period while CCS assesses who to keep,” says Bergin. “Our concern is that those on probation should be limited to the few caring healthcare providers that still exist in Maine’s prisons. If any current doctors, nurses, administrators, and other staff providing negligent and dismissive care are allowed to linger, CCS runs a great risk of polluting the atmosphere and care philosophy for new staff and losing the support of Maine’s prisoners and advocates.”

In other matters, M-PAC is working with MDOC in an attempt to lower pricing for the new private prison commissary contractor, Keefe Corporation, after learning that prices for many items are double those charged in Massachusetts prisons and also higher than MDOC’s previous commissary provider.

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