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January 17, 2011

Governor Martin O'Malley
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Dear Governor Martin O'Malley:

I am writing to you as the President and CEO of Volunteers of America Chesapeake, an organization that provides mental health and rehabilitation services to hundreds of individuals each day through our group homes, supportive permanent housing units, and outreach programs. In line with the State of Maryland, Volunteers of America Chesapeake has seen a significant increase in need for both the mentally ill housing units we run, and also our supportive services for the mentally ill.

Only a week removed from the tragedy in Tucson, I am urging you, when you unveil your budget this week, to remember those victims of horrific violence. In addition, please remember the vulnerable mentally ill population right here in our own backyard, and not continue to cut essential funds to the state's community mental health and developmental disabilities programs.

In the past three years alone Volunteers of America Chesapeake has witnessed a 12.5 percent increase in need for our supportive services for the mentally ill. In that same time period, we have been forced to cut at least 10 percent of our mental health rehabilitation services staff due to lack of funding. For three consecutive years, there has been no increase to Medicaid, which has already forced us to use fewer employees to try to provide the same services. Additional cuts in funding for mental health care would further deplete essential services provided to the state's vulnerable population.

Only months ago, Arizona also reduced its state spending on mental health. This is a slash being made all over, with over \$2 billion collectively cut from mental health care budgets to accommodate for the economic recession. These cuts in funding are resulting in fewer resources for mentally ill patients and less community outreach in order to help those who are affected by such diseases.

The challenges men, women and children suffering with mental illnesses face to exist in our society can often result in being unable to work, support their families, or afford shelter. Our organization is a place these people can turn to for the assistance they need to achieve their goals, and a place to come to in times of despair. With these potential reductions we will



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have to cut back staff and resources even more, crippling our ability to provide the support these people need.

Mental illness can attack anyone regardless of age, race, religion, or social-economic status. This is not something we can ignore. Our organization ensures that people facing these detrimental illnesses have access to treatment, support, and shelter they need. In cutting our funding you are limiting our ability to reach out to those in need, leaving these clients alone in society.

I understand that everyone is suffering from the economic recession, but cutting the funding for these essential services in our community is not the answer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Snyder".

Russell K. Snyder
President/CEO
Volunteers of America Chesapeake, Inc.
www.VOAchesapeake.org

We look to you to support our cause and help us fight for the funding we need. Everyone is suffering because of the economic recession right now, but cutting the budget for this essential service is not the answer. Please reach out to your elected officials and let them know that the funding to help mental health and developmental disabilities should not be cut, but maintained. It is essential to the success and safety of your community and our clients.

Thank you for your support

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Snyder", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Russell K. Snyder
President/CEO
Volunteers of America Chesapeake, Inc.
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