

*Arlington Mental Health and Disability Alliance
For Self-Determination & Dignity*

July 8, 2019

Honorable Chairman Dorsey and Members of the Arlington County Board:

Thank you for your response of June 28, 2019 to the letter from the Arlington Mental Health & Disability Alliance (AMH&DA). This letter is on behalf of our members.

In your letter you stated “The development and vetting of Arlington’s docket began in March 2014 and has involved collaboration and problem-solving with all critical stakeholders.” Our experience is inconsistent with what you describe. An internal process by decision makers who serve stakeholders is not the same as reaching out to stakeholders (e.g., those likely to be affected by this Docket and their families) directly.

You also state that “Mental health and criminal justice partners, the Community Services Board and Mental Health Committee members have been updated monthly throughout the process through the Mental Health Criminal Justice Review Committee’s meetings.” That is not our understanding. The MHCJRC was not told a Behavioral Health Docket was being developed until May 2019. There was no mention of the Docket at the Mental Health Committee until June 2019. Nor was the development of the Docket mentioned in the monthly CSB meeting over the years. Neither the public nor the CSB members have received a copy of the proposal.

The lack of transparency on an issue of such consequence is extremely concerning. Why the rush and why the secrecy? Can you provide us a copy of this document or must we file a FOIA?

Arlington Mental Health & Disability Alliance concerns are three-fold:

1. The public meeting is at a time and in a venue that limits participation. Caregivers of those with disabilities often need to have their phones with them and turned on. Phones are not permitted at the Court House. The date for the meeting is at the height of summer vacation season and is scheduled at 3 pm on a work day.
2. The public has not seen the document. How can we give meaningful and substantive input if we haven’t had an opportunity to review the Behavioral Health Docket proposal in advance?
3. We are unaware of the ground rules for this community meeting. How many people can attend? How will the comment period be handled? How long will we have to make comments? Who will record the comments and how? Will these comments be used to revise the proposal? Will there be a written record of this meeting? Will you be seeking letters of support for this Docket?

AMH&DA has no doubt that Arlington can have the most effective Behavioral Health Docket in the Commonwealth, given the skill of our clinicians and the support of all stakeholders. But we won’t get this if we rush this effort through in secrecy.

Respectfully,

Naomi Verdugo

Cc: Hon. R. Frances O'Brien, Chief Judge, General District Court
Mark Schwartz, County Manager
Michelle Cowan, Deputy County Manager
Theophani Stamos, Commonwealth's Attorney
Brad Haywood, Chief Public Defender
Anita Friedman, Director, Department of Human Services
Deborah Warren, Executive Director, Community Services Board