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Memorandum

To: Senator R. Edward Houck, Chair, Joint Commission on Health Care

Re: Proposed JCHC Study of Mental Health Issues in Higher Education

Date: August 31, 2009

As we discussed last week, mental health issues in higher education have not received the kind of systematic attention given to other domains of mental health policy in recent years. A study of these issues under the auspices of the Joint Commission on Health Care over the coming year would be both useful and timely in light of the opportunity for coordination with the Supreme Court's Commission on Mental Health Law Reform before the Commission completes its work in 2010.

In brief outline, I envision two task forces, one on legal issues in college mental health and a second on access to mental health services by college and university students, whose work would be overseen by the steering committee designated by the Joint Commission. The task force on legal issues would be charged with addressing the roles and responsibilities of colleges in responding to possible student mental health crises, including notification and sharing of information, threat assessment, initiation and participation in commitment proceedings and follow-up. The task force on access to services would be charged with assessing the current need for mental health services among Virginia's college and university students, and the current availability of services to address these needs. Each task force would make recommendations for training, institutional policies and practices, and any legislative action that may be needed.

I recognize that JCHC resources are scarce. However, based on the experience of the Commission on Mental Health Law Reform, I am confident that such a study can be carried out successfully within the next year without any JCHC financial support and without diverting staff attention from the Joint Commission's other priorities.

I would welcome the opportunity to craft a full proposal for the proposed study for presentation to the Joint Commission at its meeting on October 7. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important matter.