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Contact: Katie Marquette, Department of Health and Social Services – (907) 269-7867
Cori Mills, Department of Law – (907) 465-2132

**Department of Law and Department of Health and Social Services Release
Findings of Independent Investigation of API**

SEPTEMBER 12, 2018 ANCHORAGE - Today the Alaska Department of Law and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services released the findings of the independent investigation into employee safety and workplace retaliation at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute. DHSS Commissioner Valerie Davidson requested the investigation in March after concerns of workplace safety at API were brought to her attention.

Under the supervision of Attorney General Jahna Lindemuth, Anchorage attorney Bill Evans conducted an independent investigation into whether safety, retaliation, or hostile work environment issues exist at API.

“No employee should feel unsafe when they go to work,” said Commissioner Davidson. “Thank you to Attorney General Lindemuth and Mr. Evans for looking into the issue of employee safety and the work environment at API. Most importantly, thank you to all the API employees who came forward with their concerns. Without you we could not make positive changes at API to protect our staff and our patients.”

Investigation Findings

While Mr. Evans did not find evidence of organized retaliation or a hostile work environment toward employees who voice concern about workplace safety, he did find that API presents an unsafe work environment for its staff.

“Through the course of my investigation, it became evident that multiple inter-related problems plague the operation of API,” said Mr. Evans. “These issues are contributing both directly and indirectly to the legitimate perception of an unsafe work environment.”

Problems with employee scheduling, use of on-call personnel, employee qualifications, and a cultural divide on the use of seclusion and restraints are some of the reasons Mr. Evans identified for API’s unsafe work environment.

While they do not meet a legal threshold, Mr. Evans also found that practices of favoritism by API's nursing administration, poor relations with union representatives, and overall low employee morale left the impression of retaliation and a hostile work environment by staff.

Next Steps

Work at DHSS and API is already underway to address the findings in Mr. Evans's report. This includes multiple steps to address safety, low employee morale, a shortage of staff, and a lack of behavioral health resources in Alaska:

- API received \$3.1 million in FY2019 for 20 new psychiatric nurse positions and competitive salary increases for nursing staff at API. Beginning September 16, salaries of psychiatric nurses at API will increase by two pay ranges – approximately \$5-10 per hour increase.
- API has implemented a voluntary 12.5-hour shift for nurses to address problems with scheduling;
- DHSS has hired Joint Commission Resources to review and improve the hospital's seclusion and restraint policies, and to help with the implementation of those policies.
- DHSS and the Alaska State Employees Association have created a Labor Management Committee to increase communication with union representatives.
- DHSS is working in cooperation with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority to examine the feasibility of adding 24 additional beds to API.
- DHSS and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority will fund a contract to examine the feasibility of operating a separate forensic hospital in Anchorage for patients who have committed a crime or are exceptionally violent.
- DHSS submitted an application to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for an 1115 Behavioral Health Medicaid Waiver Demonstration. If approved this would take pressure off API and create a new range of behavioral health treatment services across the state.

“As was pointed out in Mr. Evans's report, there is much work that needs to be done to address both employee safety and patient safety at API,” Commissioner Davidson said. “We are committed to significantly changing the work environment at API, and taking these challenges head on. This change can only happen with the full support of API staff, which we hope to earn as we go forward.”

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