Advocates,

What an interesting moment we're in, right? So much is happening. With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts have pushed back against the state's no-mask mandate, the Delta variant has strained Texas' hospital and emergency response systems, and, just yesterday, Governor Abbott announced that he'd tested positive for COVID-19 after hosting a "standing room only" event in Collin County. Need I mention the ongoing border crisis between the state, landowners, and immigrants seeking safety or opportunity in the United States? Then there's the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban's overthrow of the government. It's hard to keep up with it all, even for those of us who work in public policy.

That said, things are eerily quiet at the Capitol building. The majority of Democrats in the House have still not returned to Austin and the Senate seems content to wait until the lower chamber establishes quorum before resuming committee hearings. Which isn't to say that the Senate hasn't been busy--they've managed to pass a number of controversial bills that align with the Governor's policy priorities, including:

- **S.B. 1 (Hughes)**--Relating to election integrity and security, including by preventing fraud in the conduct of elections in this state; increasing criminal penalties; creating criminal offenses; providing civil penalties.
- **S.B. 2 (Perry)**--Relating to requiring public school students to compete in interscholastic athletic competitions based on biological sex.
- **S.B. 3 (Hughes)**--Relating to civics training programs for certain public school social studies teachers and principals, parental access to certain learning management systems, and certain curriculum in public schools, including certain instructional requirements and prohibitions.
- **S.B. 6 (Huffman)**--Relating to rules for setting the amount of bail, to the release of certain defendants on a monetary bond or personal bond, to related duties of certain officers taking bail bonds and of a magistrate in a criminal case, to charitable bail organizations, and to the reporting of information pertaining to bail bonds.

These bills and others now await the return of House Democrats. Although we're uncertain of when that will happen, the Texas Supreme Court has sided with Republican leadership in that the House of Representatives can physically compel member attendance. In other words, the way has been cleared for DPS troopers to arrest absent Democrats and return them to the Capitol.

In other (positive) news, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has offered to extend the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) funding pool for an additional year (to October 2022) and to extend approval of the current Uniform Hospital Rate Increase Program (UHRIP) and Quality
Incentive Payment Program (QIPP) through 2022. That's a lot of technical jargon, but, in effect, the 1-year extension provides additional coverage for uninsured or low-income Texans until a new healthcare funding agreement for low-income Texans can be established with the Feds. If you recall, the Biden Administration rescinded changes to the 1115 waiver program negotiated in the final days of the Trump Administration. This is very good news for uninsured or underinsured Texans.

We think that about covers the relevant policy happenings here in Texas, but please see the advocacy opportunities listed below. As always, thank you for your time and support!

-The NAMI Texas Policy Team

Register for NAMI Smarts Module 1 on September 11th @ 1pm

NAMI Texas is kicking off another round of the "core" NAMI Smarts for Advocacy classes this fall, beginning with Module 1 on 9/11 at 1pm. REGISTER TODAY!

Tell HHSC How to Improve Crisis Diversion, Community Integration, and Forensic Services in Texas

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) wants to learn what people think about the way behavioral health services and supports are provided to people who are justice-involved or at risk of justice involvement in Texas. HHSC seeks input from people who have:

- Accessed behavioral health services in Texas;
- Experience interacting with people who have a behavioral health condition; and,
- Experience with the criminal justice system that includes behavioral health and criminal justice professionals, families, and community stakeholders.

If you are interested, please take HHSC's SURVEY and encouraging others to participate. Your answers will be anonymous. If you have questions, email ForensicDirector@hhs.texas.gov.

If you have anything you would like to share with NAMI Texas advocates in these emails, please send the information to peerpolicy.fellow@namitexas.org.

- Matthew Lovitt and the NAMI Texas Public Policy Team

Mental Health Policy in the Media

The Pandemic Has Devastated the Mental Health of Public Health Workers
A large-scale survey conducted by the CDC found that more than half of people working in public health during the pandemic reported symptoms of at least one serious mental health condition.

How Tarrant County will use $23.3 million in federal funds for mental health services
Tarrant County plans to use $23.3 million in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to create a mental health diversion center from the jail.

What My Brothers Taught Me About the Importance of Early Intervention
Due to the stigma surrounding mental health conditions, my brothers did not receive the interventions they needed.

How a Hospital and a School District Teamed Up to Help Kids in Emotional Crisis
How a Hospital and a School District Teamed Up to Help Kids in Emotional Crisis
That partnership provides prompt access to mental health services for students and includes ongoing support for school staff members in addressing kids’ mental health.

As school activity shut down amid COVID, 911 drug calls for youth skyrocketed
As teenagers lost structure amid online schooling and the cancellation of activities, the number of 911 calls involving the young and drugs rose dramatically, records show.

Austin Clubhouse shuts doors after Gov. Abbott prohibits mask mandates
Twenty-five percent of the clubhouse budget comes from state funding, meaning mask requirements can’t happen. The doors shut again on August 2, just two months after reopening in more than a year.

Mental health clinics angle for a spot in Biden budget bill
An innovative program to help people with mental health and substance abuse problems is being primed for a major expansion as the COVID-19 pandemic deepens struggles with drug use, depression and anxiety for many Americans.

NAMI Texas is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of all individuals living with mental illness and their families. Please visit our website at NAMITexas.org for more information. Help support our advocacy efforts by donating to NAMI Texas at https://namitexas.networkforgood.com/

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