



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brian Ingraham appointed by governor to state task force on mental health, substance use disorders

September 29, 2015 – Governor Pat McCrory has appointed Brian Ingraham, the CEO of Smoky Mountain LME/MCO, to a new state task force charged with making recommendations to improve the lives of N.C. residents with mental illness and substance use disorders.

The 24-member N.C. Mental Health and Substance Use Task Force will seek to reduce stigma and encourage people to seek help before their situation becomes a crisis. This special panel consists of experts from the justice system, private sector professionals, healthcare providers, county leaders and non-governmental organization entities to tackle mental health and substance use issues statewide.

Smoky Mountain, based in Asheville, manages services for mental illness, substance use disorder and intellectual/developmental disabilities in 23 western N.C. counties. In the six years Ingraham has served as Smoky's CEO, the organization has grown from its roots as an area program to a public managed care organization and expanded nearly eightfold.

"Serving on this task force is not only an honor for me – it's also a golden opportunity to effect real change and improve a public service delivery system that facilitates care for hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians," Ingraham said. "This panel's interdisciplinary nature will prove to be a tremendous advantage. Going forward, we need all hands on deck, working together, to use existing resources to achieve real results."

"It will take dedicated leaders from multiple sectors to better serve people with mental health or substance use disorders, their families and our local communities," said Rick Brajer, Secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. "Now is the time to get started."

Ingraham will also co-chair the task force's Subcommittee on Prescription Opioid Abuse, Heroin Resurgence and Special Topics. This workgroup will examine and improve efforts to heighten awareness of the dangers of opioid misuse and the benefits of medication-assisted treatment. It will also evaluate heroin use across the state and recommend best practices for prevention, treatment and recovery, as well as strategies to implement the State Plan to Reduce Prescription Drug Abuse.

Smoky Mountain LME/MCO is a local government entity that manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual/developmental disability services in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties in North Carolina. Access to services is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-849-6127.

In his executive order creating the task force, McCrory called mental illness and substance use disorders “among the biggest health care challenges that our state will face over the next decade.” Among other tasks, the panel will examine linkages between state and local governments, the role of mental health and other specialty courts, ways to increase awareness and reduce stigma, best practices for the judicial system and issues related to care for teenagers leaving the foster care system.

The task force is co-chaired by N.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Mark Martin and Brajer. Other top appointments include Public Safety Secretary Frank Perry, Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. June Atkinson, state Senator Tamara Barringer of Wake County, state Representative Susan Martin of Wilson County, Supreme Court Justice Samuel J. Ervin IV and Appeals Court Judge Donna Stroud. The group will submit findings and strategic recommendations by May 2016.

About Smoky Mountain LME/MCO

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