

Wins Justice for Mentally Ill Inmates at the Volusia County Branch Jail

FAITH has been working for nearly a year to improve conditions for mentally ill persons held in the Volusia County jail. The concerns stemmed from numerous reports of inmates not receiving needed psychotropic medications from the jail psychiatrist Dr. David Hager, as well as reports about the unjust practices of the mental health provider in the jail, Prison Health Services (PHS). PHS is known throughout the country for countless reports of abuse, lawsuits, and inhumane treatment of inmates, including Volusia County .

On April 28th over one thousand concerned citizens gathered at FAITH's annual Action Assembly at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church to demand that the Volusia County Council take action. We asked Council members to make a commitment to open the process for selecting a new mental health treatment provider. We asked that the contract or sub-contract to provide mental health treatment in the jail be given to a local provider who would then be held accountable for making badly needed changes in the way services were provided. Specifically, we asked for an end to constant problems inmates reported obtaining prescription medications. We demanded humane treatment for people exhibiting signs of psychological decompensation in jail. And we also asked that a drug treatment program be started in the jail to replace a program terminated earlier this year.

Chairman Frank Bruno and Councilman Art Giles attended the FAITH Action Assembly and committed to following through on our requests. We received written statements from Council Members Andy Kelly and Carl Persis which were generally supportive.

After months of silence from the Council and multiple articles in the *Daytona Beach News-Journal* stating that the Volusia County Jail would be continuing their contract for mental health with Prison Health Services, we were prepared to take a stand; therefore, FAITH gathered in the Council chambers on Sept. 4th to oppose the motion to extend PHS's contract for 18 months. Approximately 40 members of FAITH carpooled to the Council Chambers wearing buttons saying, "FAITH Does Not Go Away!" and took a stand for justice. Even though the *New Journal* had reported that PHS's contract would be renewed, due to the power of the FAITH organization and the commitment made by Chairman Bruno, we won justice for the mentally ill inmates in Volusia County .

After pressure from FAITH and multiple meetings with Chairman Bruno, County Manager Jim Dineen asked for Council approval to subcontract with ACT Corporation, Volusia County 's local mental health provider, for the mental health portion of the healthcare contract in the Volusia County Jail and got approval from all seven Council Members. The Rev. Jimmie Moore, Co-Chair of FAITH and Associate Pastor at Allen Chapel AME Church, made a statement on behalf of FAITH thanking the Council Members for their decision to work for a more just jail system and for following through on their commitment to FAITH at our Action Assembly. FAITH members stood in support of Rev. Moore as he made his statement and we all gathered in prayer outside the chambers to thank God for giving us the strength to fight for justice and for the great victory we have won for Volusia County.

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