

18 Feb. 65

Congressman John E. Fogarty
House Floor
Introduction of HR _____

Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill which will amend the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963 to authorize assistance in meeting the initial cost of staffing the community mental health centers -- an approach to meet the needs of a long-neglected and national problem.

As you know, the Act already provides for grants to the States for construction of comprehensive community mental health centers. It also authorizes grants to facilitate the preparation of community plans for these facilities. It does not, however, provide funds for the Federal support of the initial staffing of these centers with competently trained scientific and technical personnel. A provision to this effect, which I strongly supported, was to have been part of the Act, but was deleted in the final version.

One of the foremost problems now facing the communities which have begun planning and constructing mental health centers is how they are going to operate and maintain these centers once construction is completed.

It has become increasingly apparent that the financial burden of assuming new responsibilities for the care of the mentally ill will be more than many communities can shoulder. There is the already heavy burden of the State mental hospital system and many demands in other areas.

Even in communities that can assume new financial responsibilities there will be delays in putting mental health centers into operation because of the difficulty of raising funds to staff them.

We cannot afford any delays in remedying this situation. If we aid planning and construction while withholding funds with which the centers could sustain themselves during the first difficult years, we will starve the child after teaching it to walk.

This is then, yet another case which points to the necessity of looking at the whole problem and formulating a complete, rather than partial solution. Of what value are buildings, however well planned and constructed, without sufficient, expert staff to carry out their purpose and function?

We must provide financial support to initially staff these community mental health centers. A bill with provisions for this assistance has already been introduced to the Senate by Mr. Hill, our distinguished colleague from Alabama. The bill which I place before you today, in identical provisions, would authorize the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to make grants to meet a portion of the costs of compensation of professional and technical personnel for the initial operation of new community mental health centers or of new services in community mental health centers. These grants are to be awarded over a period of four years and three months and are to be paid on a formula basis in which sums regularly decrease over the period of the grant.

When the late President Kennedy suggested to the 86th Congress what should be done to meet the problems of mental illness and mental retardation, he proposed a three-part program. Two legs of that tripod were authorized by the 86th Congress--grants to the States for construction of community mental health centers, and grants for preliminary planning of these centers. We cannot let the whole program fall because of the failure to provide the third leg of this tripod--short term project grants for initial staffing. The late President knew this--and included it in his request to the Congress.

It is my conviction that the great momentum of the community mental health centers movement must not be lost because of the Federal government's failure to provide adequate support. It is imperative that we meet this need--swiftly and boldly--in a mood and manner to match the vision of our martyred President.