

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

BILL DeSTEPH
8TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
PART OF THE CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH

588 CENTRAL DRIVE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23454
(757) 321-8180



COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

July 14, 2021

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

On Friday, July 9th, citing an inability to meet current needs, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) announced a temporary halt to new admissions at five of the eight state mental health institutions. This includes Eastern State, the closest state mental health facility to the residents of the City of Virginia Beach. Now, the closest state hospital accepting patients is more than 200 miles away from my constituents.

The factors contributing to this did not take place overnight, and certainly should have been anticipated by this Administration. Losing adequate access to these state services is entirely unacceptable and once again, this Administration has failed Virginians in providing them some of the most basic needs.

Your Administration has prided itself on bolstering medical care and access throughout the Commonwealth. You have championed the expansion of Medicare. You talk about health equity. At no time has this ever been more important than during the COVID-19 health crisis. Mental health issues, many born of the isolation and anxiety wrought by the pandemic, are at an all-time high. And yet, under your watch, hospitals are being closed. Access is being denied. If area medical hospitals were suddenly not accepting new patients, one would expect immediate action to ensure those in need of critical medical care were treated. However, it is clear this Administration does not consider the response to mental health emergencies of similar importance.

These closures will likely result in more interactions between our law enforcement officers and those in desperate need of mental health services. The lack of available beds will undoubtedly lead to Virginians (1) unnecessarily being incarcerated in our jails, and/or (2) being denied the treatment they need, and being released. This will most assuredly endanger their lives, the lives of first responders, and others across the Commonwealth.

Virginians deserve better. This is a crisis that demands your immediate attention.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Bill DeSteph'.

Bill DeSteph