

**Testimony to Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority by Dorrance Collins—May 30, '07**

Mr. Chair, Board members,

My name is Dorrance Collins. Several months ago Faith Myers and I sent a complaint to DHSS. For a host of reasons, we wanted the state of Alaska to stop mixing forensic patients with civilly committed psychiatric patients at Alaska's state psychiatric hospital, (API), especially forensic patients with a history of sexual and violent crimes.

Ten years ago, API had a ten bed forensic unit. Ten years later API still has a ten bed unit even though the prison population in Alaska has had a dramatic increase.

Alaska law says the state can't mix a civilly committed psychiatric patient with prisoners outside of an emergency. And the state can't take a civilly committed person and house him/her in a forensic unit. The reverse should also be true.

The state psychiatric hospital takes forensic patients and dumps them into the units that house civilly committed patients. Management says it is completely safe, but if the forensic patients are safe, then let them go out the door. It is not just a question of safety. A civilly committed patient has a right to be kept separate from criminals.

Any first year student in Social Work at UAA knows that in the recent past Alaska treated a person who came down with a mental illness and someone who committed a crime exactly the same. The laws have been changed in the last 20 to 30 years, but the attitudes have not. And it is going to take persuading to get people and institutions to follow the spirit of the law.

Karleen Jackson, DHSS commissioner, after examining our complaint letter, stated the issue of mixing forensic patients with regular patients in psychiatric facilities like API should be examined and she requested a legal opinion from the Attorney General's Office and the Superior Court concerning the subject. Our complaint letter and the commissioner's letter are available. We are requesting that this issue be on the Trust Authority Board agenda.

The Trust Authority had some influence in the design of the new API hospital. The forensic unit is too small. If it is going to take an addition to the new psychiatric hospital then that needs to be done. We're asking the Trust Authority to get involved in assisting us with this issue. "A civilly committed psychiatric patient has a right to be kept separate from criminals."

Thank you,

Dorrance Collins - 929-0532

*Dorrance  
Collins*

cc: *William Doolittle, MD  
Chair - Trust Authority*

*Mr. Jeff Jesse*

*Karleen Jackson, PhD (DHSS)*

*Ms. Kathy Craft, (AMHB)*

*Mr. Ronald Adler*

*NAMI*