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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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North Suburban Human Rights Authority  
Report of Findings  
Elgin Mental Health Center  
HRA #09-100-9008

Case Summary: The HRA did not substantiate the allegations presented. The HRA's public record on this case is recorded below; the provider's response immediately follows the report.

In August 2008 the North Suburban Regional Human Rights Authority voted to open an investigation of possible rights violations within Elgin Mental Health Center's Community Psychiatrist Services Program (CPS), Brunk Unit. The complaint accepted for investigation is that staff members opened a consumer's mail (packages) without her being present. If found substantiated, the allegations would violate the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code (405 ILCS 5/2-103).

To pursue this investigation, a site visit was conducted at which time the allegation was discussed with the unit's Nursing Supervisor. A second visit was conducted at which time the allegation was discussed with unit mental health technicians.

**Background**

The Community Psychiatric Service Program provides treatment for voluntary and court ordered patients who are referred by suburban community hospitals and outpatient programs. Each treatment team has a Psychiatrist, a Physician, a Psychologist, Social Workers, Activity Therapists, Mental Health Technicians and Nursing staff. They work together to provide for the assessment, clinical treatment, patient and family education, and therapeutic environment to promote recovery. It is a 75-bed program.

**Findings**

The consumer reported that she had ordered some items that were sent to the hospital in about five boxes. She stated that when the boxes arrived at the unit, the unit's Manager took the boxes into her office, opened the packages and then gave her (the consumer) the contents of the packages. The consumer stated that although all the ordered items were accounted for, she should have been present when the boxes were opened; she was concerned that a box might have contained a packaging slip with her credit card data on it.

At the site visit, the unit's Nursing Manager was surprised that she was identified since she does not handle packages for consumers on the unit. But, she stated that policy dictates that the consumer opens the package in the presence of a staff member. That staff member is to observe the contents to ensure that it does not contain contraband. It was stated that the unit technicians retrieve mail from that department (located at another building on campus), and watch the consumer open the mail/package.

The HRA then spoke to the consumer's Case Manager who recalled the packages, but he said he gave them to the unit technicians. The two technicians interviewed were very clear about the mail policy/procedure, in that all mail must be opened with the consumer present. One technician recalled the boxes since there were so many and she stated that she put them in the Case Manager's office because she did not have the time to inventory each box. The other technician recalled that the consumer had received a bunch of CDs (compact disc) but was not sure who inventoried the boxes.

The Center's Patient Mail policy states (in part) that prior to handing mail to the patient receiving it, unit staff shall inform the patient that staff must check the mail for contraband and money in excess of the applicable program limits. If he or she agrees to allow the mail to be inspected for contraband or money, the patient shall open the mail in the presence of a staff member. If the mail is a package, the package must be opened in the presence of a Security Officer, or the patient's caseworker, or the Nurse Manager, or a staff member designated by the Nurse Manager. The policy states that all letters addressed by patients to the Governor; members of the General Assembly; Attorney General; judges; state's attorneys; Guardianship and Advocacy Commission; Protection and Advocacy, Inc.; Officers of the Department of Human Services; or licensed attorneys at law must be mailed at once to the persons for whom they are addressed without examination by staff, except to ensure that the out-going mail meets the minimum U.S. Postal Services standards.

### **Conclusion**

Pursuant to the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code, Section 2-103, "Except as provided in this Section, a recipient who resides in a mental health or developmental disabilities facility shall be permitted unimpeded, private, and uncensored communication with persons of his choice by mail, telephone and visitation."

The HRA cannot discount the claim made, but there was no evidence to support it; the allegation is unsubstantiated. The HRA takes this opportunity to ask that management instruct all Center personnel about the importance of the mail policy, in that mail must be opened by consumers in front of a staff member.

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## **RESPONSE**

**Notice: The following page(s) contain the provider response. Due to technical requirements, some provider responses appear verbatim in retyped format.**

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Rod R. Blagojevich, *Governor*



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Carol L. Adams, Ph.D., *Secretary*

**Division of Mental Health - Region 2**  
**Elgin Mental Health Center — Singer Mental Health Center**

**RECOVERY IS OUR VISION**  
Recovery is a Personal Journey of Hope, Healing, Growth, Choice, and Change

December 1, 2008

Mr. Dan Haligas, Chairperson  
North Suburban Regional Human Rights Authority  
9511 Harrison Street, W-300  
Des Plaines, IL 60016-1565

RE: HRA #09-100-9008

Dear Mr. Haligas:

Thank you for your letter dated November 5, 2008. As always, your investigations are professional and thorough.

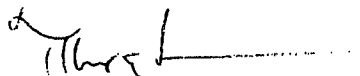
There was an allegation that staff had opened mail that a consumer had received without her being present. Per your review, the allegation was unsubstantiated.

Please be assured that staff will once again be reminded of our facility policy #201 regarding Patient Mail, that states prior to handing mail to a patient, unit staff will inform the patient that staff must check the mail for contraband and money in excess of the applicable Program limits. If the patient agrees to allow the mail to be inspected for contraband or money, the patient shall open the mail in the presence of a staff member. If the mail is a package, the package must be opened in the presence of a Security officer, or the patient's case worker, or the Nurse Manager, or a staff member designated by the Nurse Manager.

I request that this response be attached to the report and be included with any public release of your Report of Findings.

Again, thank you for your excellent work.

Sincerely,

  
Tajudeen Ibramin, BA  
Acting Hospital Administrator

TI/RP/mjp

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