



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**METRO EAST HUMAN RIGHTS AUTHORITY
REPORT OF FINDINGS
HRA CASE # 21-070-9005
ALTON MENTAL HEALTH CENTER**

The Metro East Regional Human Rights Authority (HRA) has completed its investigation of a complaint at Alton Mental Health Center (AMHC), a state-operated, medium security mental health care facility located in Alton, Illinois. The facility serves 120 patients between the ages of 18-55. Of that number, approximately 110 (88 male and 22 female) are in the forensic unit. The civil unit houses a maximum of 15 patients and includes one overflow bed which is used for emergency purposes only. Alton Mental Health Center employs 220 staff members to ensure that patients are supervised 24/7.

The allegation being investigated is:

The facility violates consumers' rights when it fails to provide adequate and private means of communication to advocacy rights agencies.

If found substantiated, the allegation represents violations of the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code (The Code) (405 ILCS 5/2-103) and facility policies.

METHODOLOGY

To pursue the investigation, an HRA team interviewed Alton Mental Health Center staff, and obtained and reviewed agency policies and the Alton Mental Health Center Consumer Handbook.

FINDINGS

The complaint states that patients at AMHC are unable to call the Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission at the Alton office's main phone number, (618) 474-5503, due to the phone number being blocked from the patient phones. The HRA Disability Manager for the region called patients on A1 (a unit at the facility) and asked them to try calling the main line to the office from each of the phones on the unit. None of the calls were able to get through. According to the hospital administrator and the IT professional on campus, all 474 prefix phone numbers were blocked when the new phone system was installed to keep the patients from calling AMHC staff on campus.

The HRA learned that the (618) 462-4561 phone number that is listed as IGAC's phone number on the patient units and in the patient handbook is an old, obsolete number that should have been removed when the new phone system was installed.

The HRA also learned that when the numbers were blocked, patients were no longer able to call other units in the facility. Patients at AMHC have historically been allowed to call each other.

HRA brochures and handouts, frequently given to patients at AMHC, list the (618) 474-5503 phone number. IGAC does not promote or provide consumers the 462 phone number. The HRA feels this could make it challenging and confusing for patients attempting to contact IGAC.

MANDATES/REGULATIONS

According to the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code (405 ILCS 5/2-103)

Sec. 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.

(a) The facility director shall ensure that correspondence can be conveniently received and mailed, that telephones are reasonably accessible, and that space for visits is available. Writing materials, postage and telephone usage funds shall be provided in reasonable amounts to recipients who reside in Department facilities and who are unable to procure such items.

(b) Reasonable times and places for the use of telephones and for visits may be established in writing by the facility director.

(c) Unimpeded, private and uncensored communication by mail, telephone, and visitation may be reasonably restricted by the facility director only in order to protect the recipient or others from harm, harassment or intimidation, provided that notice of such restriction shall be given to all recipients upon admission.

CONCLUSION

As acknowledged by the administration, patients are blocked from calling the Alton IGAC office main phone number. The HRA finds that this complaint is **substantiated**. The Code states that Unimpeded, private and uncensored communication by mail, telephone, and visitation may be reasonably restricted by the facility director only in order to protect the recipient or others from harm, harassment or intimidation, provided that notice of such restriction shall be given to all recipients upon admission (405 ILCS 5/2-103).

Further, the Code requires in Section 5/2-200 that:

“Every facility shall also post conspicuously in public areas a summary of the rights which are relevant to the services delivered by that facility as well as contact information

for the Guardianship and Advocacy Commission and the agency designated by the Governor under Section 1 of the Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure compliance with the Code’s communication rights:

The HRA **recommends** that Alton Mental Health Center reverse the block of all 474 prefix phone numbers.

The HRA also **recommends** that after all numbers are unblocked, AMHC update the patient handbook and advocacy information on the units to reflect IGAC’s main number of 618-474-5503.

To ensure compliance with the Code’s posting requirement as per Section 2/200, post accurate IGAC contact information.

