Fixes for mental health system crisis stall again

by Joel Funk, WyoFile.com

Wyoming's Joint Judiciary Committee for the second consecutive year did not produce a bill ready for the full Legislature that would address concerns with Title 25.

It was clear from the start of the committee's Dec. 17 meeting that a draft bill to change the legal processes for detaining a resident experiencing a mental health crisis would likely stall.

The committee began the 2021 interim focused on working with some of the state's county attorneys to address perceived problems with Title 25, though Senate Judiciary Chair Tara Nethercott (R-Cheyenne) told WyoFile the scope of that process was limited.

"We were not necessarily rewriting how it works or bending the system, but just kind of subtle changes," she said.

A working group of county attorneys crafted a bill for lawmakers meant to clear up statutory ambiguities and generally make improvements based on past experience, Clint Beaver, Sheridan County deputy and prosecuting attorney, said. But as the conversation unfolded through 2021, it became clear that stakeholders and lawmakers were drawn into larger conversations about Title 25 outside of the committee's original scope.

Ultimately, the committee tabled the bill for another interim. The result was frustrating, said Rep. Art Washut (R-Casper), one of the few judiciary committee members who had also worked on Title 25 statutory changes during the 2020 interim.

"I wonder what else we're leaving unattended while we devote hours and hours to Title 25 and come to a non-productive result for two consecutive interims," Washut told the committee.

However, Rep. Ember Oakley (R-Riverton), who was new to the judiciary committee in 2021, said that while she appreciated the amount of work that had been put into Title 25, the changes the committee was considering were not a substantial improvement worthy of prime time.

"What I've taken from this is that (the problems with Title 25) are systemic, and we're not going to fix it by taking little pieces," Oakley said.

Title 25 of Wyoming Statute addresses emergency detentions for those suffering from mental health challenges so severe that they may be a danger to themselves or others or are unable to meet their basic needs. Stakeholders have asked legislators to fix problems with the Title 25 system for years.

Wyoming counties struggle to find appropriate facilities for Title 25 patients and to pay for the services they need. Many had called on the judiciary committee to change statute to clarify how counties should move forward with Title 25 cases — relatively narrow amendments to existing law.

Washut said the judiciary committee had learned a lot about approaching Title 25 changes during the 2020 interim, particularly that lawmakers needed to narrow their focus on the due process changes.

But the Joint Judiciary Committee in 2021 saw significant turnover from the 2020 interim. On the Senate side, only Nethercott and Sen. R.J. Kost (R-Powell) carried over. Of nine House members of the committee, Washut was the only one present for the 2020 interim discussions on Title 25.

As a result, Washut said, a lot of the lessons learned in 2020 were lost.

"Part of the challenge that we faced this interim was that we had to kind of relearn the lessons that we learned the previous interim and we couldn't just move forward," Washut said.

Oakley, one of the new House judiciary members, said she understood how there could be frustration with new members from those who carried over. Still, Oakley said, she could not look at making the narrow changes the judiciary committee was considering without thinking of the whole Title 25 system across the state.

Nethercott said there are inherent challenges with committee turnover that she's learned to accept as part of the legislative process.

"There was a lack of historical knowledge," Nethercott said. "It's drinking from a fire hydrant. Just getting your arms around any topic is hard enough, let alone this one."

Stakeholders at the Dec. 17 meeting encouraged lawmakers not to drop the Title 25 topic entirely, even if that means revisiting it in the 2022 interim.

"I'm 27 years in the industry and trying to fix this problem, but we're committed to working with whoever we can to improve access to care to help these patients," Eric Boley, Wyoming Hospital Association president, told lawmakers.

Stakeholders from county commissioners to prosecutors to care providers are concerned about aspects of emergency detentions and involuntary hospitalizations under Title 25 in Wyoming.

Many parts of Wyoming, especially rural areas, lack facilities they can send people to. Staffing facilities that provide mental health services has proven difficult.

Determining which counties will bear the cost of emergency detentions and involuntary hospitalizations has become a constant issue—as has determining which county is responsible for the first 72 hours of care in Title 25 cases, whether it's the county where contact with patients originated and where they're being cared for.

Financial questions pop up regarding transporting patients to a designated hospital. Other questions involve figuring out how to get patients back to their homes after an emergency detention or involuntary hospitalization.

Much of the problem comes down to the differing needs of rural and urban communities. The process through the last two years, Sheridan county attorney Beaver said, has been an education on how different counties' needs are.

"There's only one Title 25 law out there," Beaver said. "There should be uniformity, but as a practical matter, it's almost impossible to have uniformity given the variability of each county."

Nethercott said the message she heard from county attorneys was that the minor statutory changes the committee was considering "wouldn't make a meaningful difference in people's lives" given the scope of the challenge.

"It was kind of, 'Thanks, but no thanks,'" Nethercott said. "Unless you're going to do something that's going to change access to facilities and cost, don't waste your time."

The judiciary committee's consideration of Title 25 is part of a larger conversation taking place in Wyoming about mental health issues. Several legislative committees are working on topics that could have an impact on how Title 25 detentions and hospitalizations play out in Wyoming. Nethercott told the judiciary committee she believes lawmakers should "lean heavily" on those doing concurrent work.

Whether one problem can be solved without solving other problems simultaneously, she said, remains to be seen.

Some have suggested that developing a statewide approach to Title 25 would be the best way to address systemic issues. While that discussion is in preliminary stages, Nethercott said, it's worthy of exploration.

It's difficult to provide appropriate care to patients with the state's patchwork system of Title 25 across Wyoming's 23 counties, Andi Summerville, Wyoming Association of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers executive director, said. A statewide approach, Summerville said, could make improvements on that front.

There's also inconsistency, Nethercott said, with costs from county to county. If the state were the payer, she said it could potentially negotiate a consistent rate across the board.

There's no clear vision as of yet for how a statewide Title 25 could be implemented or what the funding structure would look like.

"I think that it might be a change that could streamline and make it a more efficient process and then give the state the opportunity to be more involved in rule-making," Boley told WyoFile. "It's just one option on the table to try and fix the funding side of Title 25."

Some of the state's county attorneys also find the statewide approach appealing, Beaver said.

"I have definitely heard county attorneys suggest and endorse that idea," Beaver said. "I have not heard anybody express a negative view toward having the state take on that responsibility."

Such a suggestion might have its own challenges when it comes to the full Legislature, Washut said. There's strong resistance among lawmakers to expanding the size of government. Shifting costs traditionally borne by counties to the state, could be difficult concept to build consensus for.

"It's possible, but I don't think it will be an easy sell," he said.

And while putting Title 25 under the state's purview might be a step in the right direction, Rep. Karlee Provenza (D-Laramie) said, funding questions will still loom over the conversation.

"At the end of the day, this still comes back to Medicaid expansion," she said. "If we want to help Title 25, we need to expand Medicaid."

Injury

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"It's pretty simple," Tuckness said. "It as all about cowboy protection. Get that bull rider and that bull in and out of the arena in a timely manner, working together as a team and keeping everybody safe."

That safety comes at a risk for the cowboys and the bullfighters, but it's a risk he has been more than willing to take now at his 13th National Finals Rodeo, the Superbowl of rodeos.

He went to school in Meeteetse and spent time working the Cody night rodeos and the Stampede.

"I get to travel to a lot of places," Tuckness said. "Every place has something unique and cool about it. I just love getting to travel and meeting new people."

It may be a while before he is healthy and back in the arena as he recovers from a successful surgery, but it would take a lot more than getting stepped on by a bull to keep him away from the rodeo.

"Bulls all have their own personality, they can do what they want on any given day," Tuckness said. "You just go off your instincts and get yourself in position to where once something is happening, you can be in position to keep the bull rider safe."

He knows there may be some challenges getting back to 100% healthy, but a anyone who has chosen a career in rodeo is used to facing challenges.

"It's just like anything else in life, you have to put in the hard work to do it well," Tuckness said. "You just have to put your nose to the grindstone and keep at it."

School

from page 1

since "going to Orlando is not cheap."

In addition to his talent of the saxophone, Freeman was lauded by Brown as "an accomplished trumpet-player, clarinetist, pianist and soon-to-be guitarist." while Freeman joined the school board in thanking Brown for making his successes possible.

Hunt then introduced Brandon Deromedi, who's been named both the 2A Golf Coach of the Year and the Middle School Athletic Director of the Year, by saying, "If this staff member had their way, we'd never know they did anything well."

Daniels described Deromedi as "a key person" in at least half of the high school's activities and athletics. She insisted she couldn't "say enough" about what he does "every day" for students, before she was joined by Thermopolis Middle School Principal Steven Soderstrom, since Deromedi's "Athletic Director of the Year" title applied to the middle school level.

Soderstrom recalled working as Deromedi's assistant athletic director for a year, and Soderstrom confidently declared of Deromedi that "we're not going to find anybody that's willing to work as hard as him. He has 25 different hats he wears, and he wears them all super-well. You would never know he was busy, because he doesn't ever complain. He just goes to work and does more and more for the kids."

Deromedi responded by telling the board, "I can't do this without the people around me," in particular praising the students in the district's golf program for making his award possible, before he thanked the school board, administration, principals.and coaches.

Public notices

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF HOT SPRINGS COUNTY, WYOMING
FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF HILLIARD EDMOND CHESTEEN, JR. Deceased.) Probate No. P21-29

NOTICE OF PROBATE OF WILL

TO ALL PERSONS INTERESTED IN SAID ESTATE:

You are hereby notified that on the 20th day of December, 2021, the Estate of the above-named decedent was admitted to probate by the above-named Court, and that Hilliard "Chip" E. Chesteen III was appointed Personal Representative thereof. Any action to set aside the Last Will and Testament shall be filed in the Court within three (3) months from the date of the first publication of this Notice, or thereafter be forever barred.

Notice is further given that all persons indebted to the decedent or to decedent's estate are requested to make immediate payment to the Estate of Hilliard E. Chesteen Jr. and send to Michael S. Messenger, Attorney for the Estate, c/o Messenger Law Firm, P.C., P. O. Box 111, Thermopolis, WY 82443.

Creditors having claims against the decedent or the estate are required to file them in duplicate with the necessary vouchers, in the office of the Clerk of said Court, on or before three (3) months after the date of the first publication of this notice, and if such claims are not so filed, unless otherwise allowed or paid, they will be forever barred.

DATED this 17th day of December, 2021.

Michael S. Messenger
WSB #5-1438
Messenger Law Firm, P.C.

Pub. Dec. 30, 2021, Jan. 6 & 13, 2022
No. 1012

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Thermopolis Town Council will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, January 18, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. in Town Hall, to consider the Conditional Use request of Audra Dominguez, to Town Code Sec 115-1104, to allow use of a Coffee/Tea shop on her property at 225 Clark St., in the GRD. For further information please contact Codes Admin. 864-9285.

Pub. Dec. 30, 2021 & Jan. 6, 2022
No. 1014

STATE OF WYOMING) IN THE DISTRICT COURT
HOT SPRINGS COUNTY) ss. FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

IN THE MATTER OF THE CONSERVATORSHIP for JOHN DAILY HAMMOND, Absentee) Probate # P21-30

NOTICE OF PETITION FOR CONSERVATORSHIP

To John Daily Hammond. Take notice that David C Hammond and Georgeanne Hammond have filed a Petition for Conservatorship for Absentee because you have been missing since on or about, November 6th of 2021. The Petition has been filed in the above-captioned Court. David C. Hammond and Georgeanne Hammond are asking the Court to appoint them as Co-Conservators of your Estate and that if you fail to appear at the hearing to be held on the 3rd day of February, 2022, at the hour of 8:30 A.M., by calling the Court at 1-307-316-5574, ID: 875567955#, an order granting the Conservatorship will be entered. You or any person interested in this matter shall file an answer or response within 30 days of the first publication notice, or appear at the hearing.

Terri Cornella
District Court Clerk

Pub. Jan. 6, 13, 20, 27, 2022 No. 1018

Town of Kirby
LEGAL NOTICE
RENEWAL NOTICE OF
WYOMING WHISKEY, INC.
D/B/A WYOMING SATELLITE

SATELLITE MANUFACTURER PERMIT

NOTICE IS HERBY GIVEN, that Wyoming Whiskey, Inc. made application for renewal of a Satellite manufacturer Permit (Combo Bar & Package Store) in the Town of Kirby Clerk's Office.

Protests, if any, against the renewal of the License will be heard on January 13, 2022 at 6:30 P.M. - Council Members, Town of Kirby Town Hall located at 114 N Bryan, Kirby, Wyoming.

Sandy Scott
Clerk/Treasurer

Pub. Dec. 30, 2021 & Jan. 2, 2022
No. 1016

**WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
CHEYENNE, WYOMING
NOTICE OF ACCEPTANCE OF AND
FINAL SETTLEMENT FOR HIGHWAY WORK**

Notice is hereby given that the State Transportation Commission of Wyoming has accepted as completed according to plans, specifications and rules governing the same work performed under that certain contract between the State of Wyoming, acting through said Commission, and **Mountain Construction**, The Contractor, on Highway Project Number **N343042 in Hot Springs County**, consisting of **left turn lane**, and the Contractor is entitled to final settlement therefore; that the Director of the Department of Transportation will cause said Contractor to be paid the full amount due him under said contract on **February 16, 2022**.

The date of the first publication of this Notice is **January 6, 2022**.

STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF WYOMING

Pam Fredrick
Senior Budget Analyst
Budget Program

Pub. Jan. 6, 13 & 20, 2022 No. 1019

NOTICE

The Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital Board of Trustees is seeking to fill a vacant position on the board.

Interested individuals should write a letter to the Board of Trustees indicating your qualifications and reasons you are interested in serving. The individual appointed to this vacancy will serve until the next Hospital Board of Trustees election in November of 2022.

The deadline for the letters of interest is midnight, January 21, 2022. Please submit your letters to:

Lacy Andreen
150 E. Arapahoe St.
Thermopolis, WY 82443

Pub. Jan. 6, 2022 No. 1017

Notice of application: Retail Liquor License -- Transfer

Notice is hereby given that on the 28th day of December 2021, Hot City LLC. filed an application to transfer a Retail Liquor License in the office of the Clerk of the Town of Thermopolis for the following building 203 S. 6th Street and protests, if there be any, against the transfer of such license will be heard at the hour of 7:00 pm on the 18th day of January 2022, in the Town Hall Council Chambers located at 420 Broadway, Thermopolis, WY.

Tracey Van Heule,
Clerk/Treasurer

Pub. Jan 6 & 13, 2022 No. 1020