

## Memo

From: Anita Roessmann, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Montana

Re: Legislative Alert Update for April 16, 2009

Date: April 16, 2009

Hello everyone,

Hold your fire and say hallelujah.

The Senate Finance Committee met again this afternoon in order to reconsider HB 132. The Committee un-tabled the diversion bill, amended it and passed it, by a vote of 16 to 3.

Sen. Esp's amendment eliminates the requirement that the Department of Public Health and Human Services contract for diversion beds and eliminates the requirement that the Department pay for diversion. The amendment addresses concerns raised this morning that the Department might have legal liability to pay for diversion beds, even if there isn't enough funding.

However, the amendment does not prevent the Department from paying for diversion beds, pursuant to crisis services plans developed by the counties and approved by the Department. Under HB 130, for instance, a county could ask the Department to provide matching funds, up to a certain amount, for diversion pursuant to a county crisis services plan.

I can't speak for everyone who has been advocating for these bills, but I think this amendment is a positive development. And the way it happened illustrates some of the wonderful aspects of the legislative process: hard work, bipartisanship, flexibility, a willingness to work out differences, and the desire of lawmakers to do the right thing.

### ***WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW:***

Please thank today's heroes, Sen. Dan McGee of Laurel and Sen. John Esp of Big Timber. As chairman of the Law and Justice Interim Committee, Sen. McGee has shown a fierce commitment to the three crisis bills. Sen. Esp has been an equally fierce advocate for people with mental illness for his entire legislative career. Both Senators are serving their last terms and will not be returning next session. Today, they worked hard together to figure out how to save HB 132.

- Send your thank you to Sen. McGee and Sen. Esp at the on-line message form: <http://leg.mt.gov/css/sessions/61st/legwebmessage.asp> .
- You can also leave a brief message at 406-444-4800, or

➤ Fax a letter to 406-444-4875, or

Please call me on my cell phone if you have any questions, 406-461-5350, or write to me at [anita@disabilityrightsmt.org](mailto:anita@disabilityrightsmt.org) .

Thank you for all you do for people with disabilities.

Anita

Anita Roessmann  
Staff Attorney  
Disability Rights Montana  
1022 Chestnut  
Helena, Montana 59601  
800-245-4743  
406-449-2344  
406-449-2418 fax  
[anita@disabilityrightsmt.org](mailto:anita@disabilityrightsmt.org)