



Virginia Department of  
Behavioral Health &  
Developmental Services

## **Incoming Commissioner Alison Land Remarks**

*Joint Subcommittee for Health and Human Resources Oversight*

December 2, 2019

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. Thank you very much for inviting me here today. I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself and tell you a little bit about my initial approach to my role as Commissioner.

I come to DBHDS from Sentara Healthcare, where I have been overseeing behavioral health services since 2015. My focus has been on increasing access to behavioral health services and improving the quality of those services. The major access initiatives included psychiatrist recruitment and retention, optimizing inpatient bed utilization, developing outpatient behavioral health centers, and expanding virtual assessment and telepsychiatry programs. My major quality and compliance initiatives included reducing assaults, readmissions, ED boarding, eliminating ligature risk, and documentation compliance. Previously, I worked for a Healthcare System in Georgia where I oversaw a variety of hospital services, including the behavioral health center, strategy, planning, quality, coordinated care and their Centers of Excellence for stroke, spine, joints, diabetes and bariatric surgery. I have been devoted to improving systems of care and making sure people have access to needed services. I am excited about continuing this journey at DBHDS.

One thing I have learned over the years is the best solutions are those that integrate a wide range of perspectives and emphasize partnership and collaboration. I also recognize this is a time of intense scrutiny and monitoring. It is a time of great challenges; but it is also a time of enormous opportunity – to transform, strengthen and expand access to our system.

As you know, the state psychiatric hospitals are experiencing unprecedented rates of temporary detention order admissions, increasing the average hospital census to over 100 percent on some days. I am committed to finding both long and short-term solutions to this growing concern through addressing systematic improvements and continuing to build out community-based services through STEP-VA and the proposed Behavioral Health Redesign. Ensuring individuals are receiving the most appropriate level of care in their communities is essential in promoting recovery in the Commonwealth. Expanding crisis services will be key in ensuring this mission becomes a reality.

Additionally, we will continue focusing on the main areas of the DOJ settlement agreement where we have not yet gained compliance. It's important to note we are at the point now where we are not just building services for a concentrated population but we are spreading services around the state that have not been there before.

I will work to ensure all the necessary structures and programs are in place to ensure the Commonwealth achieves compliance with the settlement agreement. I plan to be very visible and connected as we work through these challenging issues.

Additionally, I plan to spend time listening and learning much more about Virginia's behavioral health and developmental services system. This will mean listening to the tremendously experienced and talented staff in Richmond and in the field, as well as devoted stakeholders, advocates and the individuals receiving services across the Commonwealth. I feel especially privileged to be part of this Department at such a critical time for both the behavioral health and developmental services systems.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for inviting me today.