A little History

- The voters of California approve Proposition 63 in November 2004 and the law, officially enacted as the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), became effective on January 1, 2005
- The MHSA provides funding for new and expanded mental health services and supports
- Part of the law also created the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC or Commission)

Where do “WE” come in?

- The MHSOAC must “ensure that the perspective and participation of members and others suffering from severe mental illness and their family members is a significant factor in all of its decisions and recommendations.”

That means you!

- Your knowledge, opinions, and wisdom are valuable because:
- The Commission needs your input in order to do its job.

You are not Alone!

- If you have questions or want some assistance, both Commission staff and Public Participation Assistants are available to help you
- Public Participation Assistants are volunteer members of the Commission’s Client and Family Leadership Committee (CFLC) who can help you with the public Comment Card to going over your notes or planned comments with you

Get involved!

- While Public Comment periods at Commission meetings allow only for brief input—not dialogue—other avenues for greater input exists through the MHSOAC’s Committees
- Committee membership rosters, meeting schedules, and locations, membership applications and charters are available at: www.mhsoac.ca.gov/committees/committees.aspx
- For more information about the MHSOAC, please visit: www.mhsoac.ca.gov
Public Comment

- Public Comment period is designed to allow you to get your input – briefly stated – into the public record.
- However, it is not the time for you to engage in conversation with the Commissioners (unless they ask you questions, which you can then answer).

There are two types of Public Comment taken during MHSOAC meetings:
- Public Comment on an Agenda Item
- General Public Comment

Public Comment on an Agenda Item

- Takes place following a presentation and discussion on an item
- Takes place when the Commission will vote on the item that day or at the next month’s meeting

General Public Comment

Usually takes place twice:
- At the end of the morning session, before the Commission breaks for lunch
- At the end of the meeting, before the meeting is adjourned

First Steps

- Fill out a Public Comment Card (it’s on orange-colored paper!)
- All you really need to fill in on the card is your name and the agenda item/tab # or topic you wish to address
- All info is OPTIONAL
- Turn your Public Comment Card to the Commission staff table before the start of the public comment section on the Agenda item you wish to speak about
- If you wish to speak during the General Public Comment segment, indicate this by writing “General” or “General Public Comment” on the “Agenda Item” line

The “Clock will be Ticking!”

- You will typically have THREE MINUTES to make your comments
- The Commission Chair has the power to shorten that time, especially if there are many people who want to speak

Be Prepared

- Look over any available materials on your topic
- Talk to others, listen and ask questions!

Some tips:

- You can take notes or jot your ideas down
- Make eye contact as you speak
- Use a conversational tone; don’t “preach”
- Be to-the-point and give examples
- Be Positive: Don’t just focus on the problems at hand. Be prepared to suggest and support solutions!

Things to consider

- What do you want the Commissioners to know?
- Are you for or against something?
- Why?
- Give your best two or three reasons
- Remember, you can always “pass” for any reason

Experience = Expertise

- Being able to speak from personal experience can make your comments more powerful
- Focus on what you know, your own experience and point of view
- It’s your perspective that the Commissioners needs to hear!