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Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner James Perdue speaks to attendees at a town hall meeting last weekend.



By [Alison James](#)

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## Riverbend hosts town hall

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In a town hall meeting Thursday, stakeholders, consumers and community members were invited to share their thoughts and hear from Commissioner James Perdue about mental health services in Alabama.

As commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Perdue touched on a number of topics of interest, including the need for greater funding, expanded facilities and increased conversation about the challenges facing the mental health field. Representatives from Scope 310 and Arc of the Shoals were on hand to share their thoughts, as were local police officers, mental health consumers and county commissioners and probate judges, including Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore and Franklin County Commissioner Rayburn Massey.

“Mental health and drug abuse are a major concern not only for Franklin County but the world,” Massey said. “I just wanted to come and hear what Mr. Perdue had to say.”

Moore said Riverbend Center, as well as ECM, have been excellent resources for Franklin County, and he was glad to hear Perdue enumerate strides that can be taken to continue to increase the quality and extent of mental health services offered in Alabama. “I appreciate Mr. Perdue coming up and enlightening us on some of the mental health issues we have,” Moore said.

Perdue, while stipulating that greater funding is needed for many efforts that would improve mental healthcare in Alabama, said there are immediate actions that can be taken that will cost little to no money, like education on autism, and consolidating mental health facility management into the Tuscaloosa area rather than Montgomery. “The mission of mental health has never been money,” Perdue pointed out – while money is needed, that’s not the ultimate focus. Money is important to mental health only insofar as it enables the department to expand services. “We’re defined by what we’re not doing.”

Perdue said when he decided to take the commissioner job, he figured he already had a pretty good handle on the needs and challenges of mental health services in Alabama. “I realized I knew about two slices of a big pie,” he said. He encouraged stakeholders to continue the discussion, to continue to spread the word about mental healthcare needs, and he thanked Riverbend, Arc of the Shoals and Scope 310 for their continued efforts. When one town hall attendee expressed his concern that elected officials at the state level aren’t doing enough to further mental health in Alabama, Perdue had these words of sympathy and encouragement to share: “Don’t give up on it. Get involved in it.”