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AL Department of Mental Health could make major changes to improve system

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By Joshua Gauntt, Reporter CONNECT

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY, AL (WBRC) - State Mental Health Commissioner Jim Perdue admits his department and the state of mental health in Alabama is far from perfect. Money is tight but Perdue feels improvements can be made. Perdue is holding town halls throughout the state to get public input.

"Not only to show them what our missing is but to listen to people who have struggles in their communities," Perdue said.

Purdue wants to make changes within the department. He feels consolidating management and moving to Tuscaloosa where the state's three mental hospitals are is one way to improve.

"The state of mental health in Alabama is complicated," Joseph Abrams with Tuscaloosa's Mental Health Alliance said.

Abrams says lack of funding and the stigma of mental health are big challenges.

"There has to be an increase in funding and an increased understanding in communication of what it is to be inflicted with a mental health-related issue," Abrams said, "Mental health is such a compound, complicated phrase that encompasses a lot. It encompasses depression, anxiety and we see a lot of that on the University of Alabama campus."

The state also wants to expand rehabilitation and medical treatment programs within the department of corrections.

"Expanding treatment would help ease the criminal justice system and actually help people get treatment and potentially re-enter society. I think that's a really good adjustment," Abrams added.

Abrams says the state also needs to do a better job of interacting and getting to know people who have mental health-related issues. He says that can be a springboard for positive change within the system.

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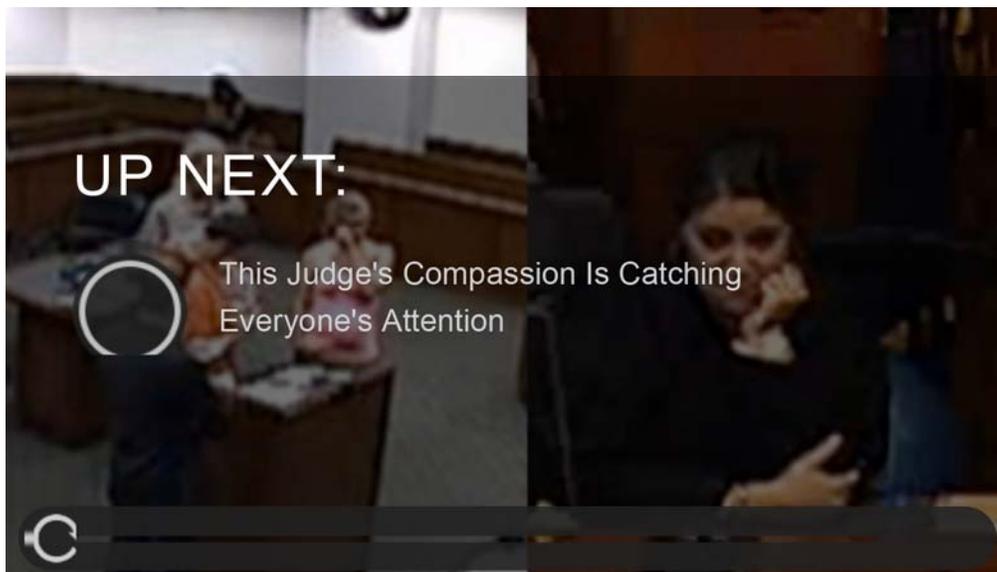
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