



J. Kevin Stitt
Office of the Governor
State of Oklahoma

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Kyle Hilbert
Speaker of the House
Oklahoma House of Representatives

The Honorable Lonnie Paxton
President Pro Tempore
Oklahoma State Senate

via email and hand delivery

Dear Speaker Hilbert and Pro Tem Paxton:

The troubling issues that have continued to emerge at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services are the result of years of mismanagement—these challenges did not arise overnight. When I appointed Commissioner Allie Friesen, I specifically charged her with shining a light on the agency, rooting out longstanding problems, and building a more accountable and transparent department. What we are seeing now is the necessary, if painful, result of that mission being carried out with integrity and urgency.

I appreciate the House's ongoing oversight efforts, including the work of the legislative committee currently investigating these matters. Their scrutiny has helped underscore the seriousness of the situation and the importance of getting this right. As we move forward, I am taking the following steps to restore public trust and ensure continued delivery of essential mental health services to Oklahomans:

First, to triage the current financial situation, I am bringing in a highly respected, independent financial expert from outside ODMHSAS to take control of the department's finances on a temporary basis. This individual will determine the full extent of the department's shortfall and produce an accurate, credible supplemental budget request to carry the department through the end of the fiscal year. We cannot ask the Legislature to act without confidence in the numbers, and this step ensures you will have it. That expert will be named in the coming days.

Second, in the coming days, I will formally name the special investigator I previously announced to conduct a full and independent review of the agency's operations. This will be a well-regarded attorney with deep experience in complex internal and public investigations. The investigator will report directly to my office and have full authority to follow the facts wherever they lead. I look forward to sharing the results and recommendations of this special investigation with the Legislature and the public when the investigation is complete.

Third, I have directed Oklahoma Healthcare Authority CEO, Ellen Buettner, and officials within ODMHSAS to conduct a top-to-bottom review of all Medicaid and federally funded functions within ODMHSAS. This team will evaluate whether Title XIX responsibilities and related activities could be more efficiently—and accountably—administered by relocating them under the Healthcare Authority or managed differently from how they have been handled to date. The goal of this effort will be to determine in an unbiased way the best way of managing federal funds and programs going forward. I invite legislators to collaborate on this effort as it is possible legislation may be needed to implement reforms that will improve the state's delivery and management of these services. I welcome your suggestions of legislative leaders who can assist in this review.

I am committed to working with you to correct the problems at ODMHSAS, bring transparency to the agency, and make sure the department is fully equipped to carry out its vital mission. These steps are necessary and urgent to ensure that we restore public confidence in state government's management of mental health services and that taxpayers are protected from financial mismanagement. I look forward to partnering with the Legislature to support this work, including providing the supplemental funds necessary to stabilize the agency and enable the independent experts we are bringing in to do their jobs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Stitt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "K" and "S".

J. Kevin Stitt
Governor of Oklahoma