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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Mental Health Task Force Issues Report

#### *Report Addresses Abuse and Neglect*

JEFFERSON CITY, MO – Lieutenant Governor Peter Kinder released the findings and recommendations of the Missouri Mental Health Task Force today at a press briefing at the Jefferson City offices of the Department of Mental Health.

The Task Force was formed by Governor Matt Blunt in June 2006 to address reports of deaths of The Department of Mental Health clients because of abuse and neglect. Lt. Governor Kinder chaired the eight-member Task Force with Co-Chair Interim Mental Health Director Ron Dittmore.

The charge of the Task Force was to develop and propose long-term solutions to prevent abuse and neglect, assure through investigations of abuse and neglect allegations, and recommend actions to increase safe delivery of mental health services for Missourians with disabilities.

The Task Force report includes 25 recommendations covering the areas of prevention, investigations, and oversight. The Task Force held six public hearings around the state and utilized information obtained from the Department of Mental Health, other state agencies and recommendations from the public.

“It is our duty to protect and care for our most vulnerable citizens” said Lt. Governor Peter Kinder. “These recommendations are aimed at increasing the safety of our mental health system, both in state operated facilities and community facilities. Abuse and neglect of our state’s vulnerable citizens is unacceptable, and my expectation is that this report will lead to real change. ”

(more)

The recommendations also include a call for the Department of Mental Health to: 1) pursue accreditation of its six habilitation centers and community providers that serve persons with developmental disabilities; 2) ensure staff are trained on identifying and reporting abuse and neglect; 3) increase penalties for failure to report abuse and neglect; 4) establish a mental health fatality review board; 5) and allow access to non-confidential information in substantiated abuse and neglect investigations. In addition, the Department is to issue an annual report on its progress in implementing the recommendations.

“These recommendations represent what Missourians told us they wanted for the state’s mental health system,” said Ron Dittmore, Interim Director for the DMH and co-chair of the Task Force. The task force heard from 271 individuals, either in person or with written comments. “Both Lt. Governor Kinder and I want to thank all those who addressed the task force. We also want to thank the Task Force members for their commitment to this process.”

The complete report from the Missouri Mental Health Task Force is available at [www.dmh.missouri.gov/mmhtaskforce/index.htm](http://www.dmh.missouri.gov/mmhtaskforce/index.htm)