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PRESS RELEASE

As the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) program for persons with serious mental illness since 1999, Guam Legal Services Corporation – Disability Law Center (GLSC-DLC) monitors and investigates allegations of abuse and neglect regarding the care and treatment of individuals with serious mental illness in institutions, facilities, and group homes in our community.

As a result of a recent investigation, GLSC-DLC has grave concerns that the Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center (GBH&WC) has disregarded a pattern of repeated elopements and failed to address its practices that put the lives and safety of individuals who need help at risk and in harm's way. When the GBH&WC determines that an individual is a danger to themselves or others, or is gravely disabled, as a result of serious mental illness, they are legally and morally obligated to provide appropriate care and treatment in a safe environment, promoting the recovery and well-being of such individuals.

Since the start of this year, there have been five (5) elopements from the Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center facility that occurred after having been determined to be a danger to themselves or others, or to be gravely disabled. "Elopement" refers to a patient or client leaving a psychiatric facility without permission or necessary supervision, often due to a serious mental illness and/or diminished capacity to make safe decisions.

GLSC-DLC recently discovered that GBH&WC does not have specific policies and procedures or written guidance in place to prevent or respond to elopements by individuals with serious mental illness that can have serious consequences, including injury or even death. GBH&WC practices and lack of preventive guidelines and action toward elopements should be unacceptable in our community of Guam.