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LEGISLATORS HEAR THANKS AND STORIES OF RECOVERY AT 23RD ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE APPRECIATION BREAKFAST

WHITFIELD—Mississippi State Hospital employees made their appreciation known to legislators during the 23rd Annual Legislative Appreciation Breakfast on February 9, but they weren't the only ones.

Volunteers and mental health advocates also attended to thank legislators for supporting mental health, and special guest speakers Lori Dickerson and Stephanie Butler both brought a personal touch by telling stories of their own personal experiences in Mississippi's public mental health system.

"We believe that their stories can help all of us understand just how crucial the services that we provide are when a person finds themselves in need, whether that's a personal need or the need of one of our children," MSH Director James G. Chastain said.

Dickerson, a Tupelo resident, spoke of the dark days in her life when she was diagnosed as clinically depressed – but also of the help and support she received from DMH and her road to recovery.

"I thank God, literally, that public mental health services such as Region 3, North Mississippi State Hospital and the crisis center were there to help me," she said. "These medical professionals have been caring, concerned, knowledgeable and skilled, and their team effort has allowed me to take back my life from the grip of the fear of clinical depression and overwhelming anxiety.

"The mere fact that I have been able to return to the career I love so much, and successfully function in a very demanding and challenging role as a medical/surgical nurse, working at the bedside, attests to the caliber of treatment given from our local, state-funded mental health programs."

Stephanie Butler, a Jackson resident, wasn't in need of DMH services for herself. Her daughter, born with a developmental disability, was. While doctors once told Butler her daughter Gabby would never live to see the age of three, she has spent much of her 18 years receiving care from Hudspeth Regional Center in Rankin County.

"Thanks to the outstanding services that we were able to receive, she was able to enlist in the early intervention program, and she is part of the residential program at Hudspeth," Butler said. "She's received the best medical, physical and occupational therapy around."

She asked legislators to continue to support mental health, so that others can find their needs met in the same way she has.

“The services are so rare, but yet so very needed,” Butler said. “I’m here as a living testimony as to what can happen for one person in this state by using the services of the Department of Mental Health.”

MSH, a facility of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, was founded in 1855 and facilitates improvement in the quality of life for Mississippians who are in need of mental health, chemical dependency or nursing home services, by rehabilitating to the least restrictive environment, utilizing a range of psychiatric and medical services, which reflect the accepted standard of care and are in compliance with statutory and regulatory guidelines. The hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission.

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PHOTO ATTACHED:

Legislative Appreciation Breakfast – (Left to right) Senator Nancy Collins, North Mississippi State Hospital employee Debbie Hall, Senator Hillman Frazier and Senator David Blount listen during the Friends of Mississippi State Hospital’s Legislative Appreciation Breakfast on Wednesday, Feb. 9, 2011. An annual event during which employees and volunteers show their thanks to legislators for supporting mental health, this year’s breakfast featured two Mississippians who shared their personal experiences from Mississippi’s public mental health system.