



**DBHDD**

Georgia Department  
of Behavioral Health &  
Developmental Disabilities

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Thursday, October 24, 2024

**CONTACT:**

Camille Taylor

Director of Communications

[camille.taylor1@dbhdd.ga.gov](mailto:camille.taylor1@dbhdd.ga.gov)

**Georgia Launches “Operation New Hope” to Support Community  
Reintegration, Reduce Forensic Waitlist Backlog**  
*\$3.2 Million Mental Health Program Honors Late Speaker David Ralston*

**SAVANNAH**– The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) will launch the “Operation New Hope” program this fall at the Georgia Regional Hospital in Savannah. The facility is designed to help individuals transition from forensic commitments back into the community, reducing the number of people waiting in local jails for competency restoration services at state psychiatric hospitals.

“Operation New Hope is more than just a new facility—it represents a turning point for those ready to rebuild their lives,” said Commissioner Kevin Tanner. “With support from the \$3.2 million allocation by the Georgia General Assembly, it eases the burden on local jails while honoring the late Speaker David Ralston’s vision of accessible care and hope for every Georgian.”

Operation New Hope will serve up to 30 individuals at a time, offering a tailored therapeutic program that addresses each resident’s unique needs and challenges, helping them reintegrate into the community with dignity and stability. The support of Governor Brian Kemp and the Georgia General Assembly’s allocation of \$3.2 million for Fiscal Year 2025 were been instrumental in making this facility possible.

## **Building a Legacy of Hope**

Named in honor of the late Speaker of the House David Ralston, the facility reflects his legacy of transformative mental health reform. The facility features a mural capturing Speaker Ralston's powerful words, "Today, hope won," spoken during the passage of the 2022 landmark Georgia Mental Health Parity Act (House Bill 1013). Sheree Ralston, mental health champion and wife of the late Speaker, joined Commissioner Tanner at the facility's ribbon cutting ceremony on Monday, October 21. Guests were able to tour the hospital building, which was renovated into apartment-style "pods."

"David would have truly loved Operation New Hope and everything it stands for," said Mrs. Ralston. "He believed deeply in giving people the chance to heal and rebuild their lives. It's a place where hope can flourish, and where individuals can find the support they need to move forward. I know he would be so proud of this effort to foster healing and hope in our community."

## **Addressing the Forensic Backlog**

The Department's Forensic Services is experiencing delays in admitting individuals to our hospitals due, in part, to increased demand for inpatient treatment. As of October 18, more than 760 individuals are waiting in jail to receive hospital-based court-ordered restoration services. The state has 641 hospital beds dedicated to Forensic Services, which provides mental health services to individuals who are incompetent to stand trial (IST) or not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI). The Department estimates that it needs more than 230 beds to address the backlog. Through innovative initiatives like Project New Hope, the Department will bring more than 70 new forensic beds across the state by January.

## **Fostering a Therapeutic Environment**

Georgia Southern University and EmployAbility partnered with DBHDD to install the interior mural for the building's common area. Officials from the university and the community provider joined the ceremony.

The muralist, Marcela Sinnett, is currently earning her Master of Studio Arts from Georgia Southern University. With assistance from EmployAbility, DBHDD was able to award the student a stipend of \$1,000 for the project.

“EmployAbility is thrilled to partner with DBHDD on the Operation New Hope Mural Project, an inspiring initiative that will create a vibrant, healing and supportive space for individuals receiving psychosocial rehabilitation,” said EmployAbility Chief Executive Officer Brendan Ferrara.

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