

# MENTAL HEALTH REPORT: Findings copy others' material

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A "new vision" outlined for mental health care in Georgia last week isn't so new after all.

Large sections of a report by Gov. Sonny Perdue's mental health commission were lifted, often verbatim, from a Michigan study published in 2004 and from two other sources, a review by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution found. The commission's report, released last week by the governor's office, credits none of the cloned material.

The report presents as its own work entire sentences, paragraphs and longer passages from other sources, with no more than superficial editing. It duplicates, with only two minor changes in wording, the "values" listed in the Michigan study. Seven of Georgia's eight "key findings" mirror Michigan's. Even Georgia's vision statement is appropriated from the Michigan report.

Michigan's "new vision," 2004: "For our children and adults, from Northern to Southern Michigan, the mental health system needs to be reinvigorated and reinvested in."

Georgia's, 2008: "For our children and adults, within Georgia, the mental health system needs to be reinvigorated and reinvested."

Perdue created the Mental Health Service Delivery Commission last year after the Journal-Constitution revealed dangerous conditions in the state hospitals. The newspaper's investigation found at least 136 suspicious deaths and almost 200 confirmed cases of patient abuse since 2002.

The articles also prompted an investigation by the U.S. Justice Department. That agency recently sent Perdue a letter demanding immediate reforms at the state hospital in Atlanta, where it said dangerous conditions have left patients vulnerable to injury, illness and death.

The governor's office received the Justice Department letter May 30. Perdue's aides didn't release the letter until June 2 — minutes after announcing the commission had issued its report.

The pilfered sections of the report diminish eight months of work by the commission, suggesting a study process that lacked sufficient rigor. Even much of what appears to be original work contains the vaguest of ideas. For example, the commission suggested more spending on community-based mental health services, but did not say how much money is needed or where it could come from.

The Journal-Constitution discovered the extensive copying after an unidentified e-mailer alerted reporters to possible plagiarism. The newspaper also found passages were taken from publications by the American Psychiatric Association and the University of Texas.

Officials said an employee of the Georgia Department of Human Resources, which operates the seven state psychiatric hospitals, wrote the copied sections. The woman recently left the agency for reasons unrelated to the report, spokeswoman Dena Smith said. The woman could not be reached Tuesday at her numbers published in telephone directories.

Commission members had no idea their report borrowed from other documents, said the panel's chairman, Abel Ortiz, a consultant who formerly was Perdue's chief health care adviser.

"The reason it didn't catch our eyes was this all generalizes from state to state," Ortiz said. "It's stuff we've heard of and we knew about.

"It's very unfortunate it happened," he added. "But I don't want it to detract from the fact that the commission did get into these issues."

The commission's 16 members included state legislators, a judge, a psychiatrist, a sheriff, advocates for people with mental illness and the state human resources commissioner. The group met eight times between October and May.

Several commission members declined to comment on the newspaper's findings or could not be reached Tuesday. One member, Dougherty County Superior Court Judge Stephen Goss, said a set of recommendations within the report accurately reflected work by a subcommittee he served on.

Another member, Dr. Charles Nemeroff, chairman of psychiatry at Emory University School of Medicine, said: "There is nothing wrong with using material another state has used. But certainly you should give credit for it. It should be cited."

The similarities between the Georgia and Michigan reports are rhetorical and substantive, as well as stylistic.

For instance, both documents assert: "Too often, people must be in crisis to receive mental health care." Both also say: "There is inappropriate use of the juvenile and criminal justice systems for people with mental illness and emotional disturbance."

A section summarizing public testimony to the Georgia commission varied only slightly from the Michigan text.

"Many people reported that there should be a broader array of supportive and hospital services in the community to serve people from early childhood through adulthood," the Georgia report says.

"Many people reported that there is not a continuum of supportive services in the community, continuing from early childhood through adulthood," Michigan's document says.

Other portions seem to have been copied and pasted from one document to the other. The list of values for Georgia's mental health system is presented in boldfaced italic type — exactly as it appeared in the Michigan report.

The copying was clumsier in some sections.

The Georgia document repeats language from Michigan saying the commission had provided "a detailed overview" of the mental health system "in Appendix E of this report." But unlike Michigan's, Georgia's report contains no Appendix E.

One complete section in the Georgia commission's report — an essay titled "What Is Mental Illness" — contained no original work, the Journal-Constitution found.

By typing phrases and passages from the essay into Google, the Internet search engine, the newspaper determined that every sentence of the essay was taken either from a psychiatric association document, published in 2005, or a 2006 report by the University of Texas' Houston-area psychiatric center.

The report owes its greatest debt, however, to Michigan. Officials there had no idea their work had been reconstructed in Georgia. Though not angry with Georgia, they weren't exactly flattered by the imitation, either.

Irene Kazieczko, Michigan's director of community mental health services, said she had never seen one state plagiarize another.

"Usually," she said, "a state report reflects the unique characteristics of the state."

## BORROWED WORDS

A report released last week by Gov. Sonny Perdue's Mental Health Service Delivery Commission lifted extensively from three other sources.

University of Texas, 2006: "Mental illness is a common affliction. There are approximately 400,000 people who suffer from mental illness living in Harris County."

Georgia, 2008: "Mental illness is a common affliction. There are approximately 140,000 people who suffer from mental illness living in Fulton County."

MICHIGAN, 2004:

"Our current system evolved over time, beginning in 1963 when President Kennedy signed the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Act that, for the first time, created a role for the federal government. Michigan quickly followed the federal lead with the passage of the state Community Mental Health Act (P.A. 54) in 1964."

GEORGIA, 2008:

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Note: Georgia did not enact such a law, actually titled the Community Services Act for the Mentally Retarded, until 1972.

"WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?" (American Psychiatric Association, 2005):

"In the past, the subject of mental illness was surrounded with mystery and fear. Today, we have made tremendous progress in our understanding and, especially in our ability to offer effective treatments. However, questions about mental illness often go unanswered and stand in the way of people receiving help."

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> To view the report and read the Hidden Shame series about Georgia's mental hospital system:  
[www.ajc.com/hiddenshame](http://www.ajc.com/hiddenshame)

IN MICHIGAN, 2004 ... AND IN GEORGIA, 2008 Note: The Georgia report contains no "Appendix E"  
IN MICHIGAN, 2004 ... AND IN GEORGIA, 2008

<http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/printedition/2008/06/11/mental.html>