



**James “Tiger” Morton
Catastrophic Illness Commission
2019 Annual Report**



**STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

James "Tiger" Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission

State Capitol Complex, Building 6
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January 8, 2020

The Honorable Jim Justice
Governor, State of West Virginia
1900 Kanawha Boulevard East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Honorable Members of the
West Virginia Legislature
1900 Kanawha Boulevard East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Governor Justice and Members of the Legislature:

Is saving a life worth \$11,750?

Due to the overall number of clients doubling over the last several years and the increasing number of medical claims, the James "Tiger" Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission (Commission) will pay approximately \$350,000 in claims in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020, critically reducing its funds.

The Commission pays an average of \$11,750 per client for life-saving treatment. Currently, the Commission covers 36 medical clients. That number of clients multiplied by the average amount of expenses equals \$428,328. Over the past five years, the Commission has received approximately \$100,000 in annual appropriations to cover personnel, administrative, and client assistance expenses. If the Commission does not receive additional money for SFY 2121, the Commission's funds will be exhausted as client obligations will exceed the available cash balances.

The Commission urgently asks the Legislature to provide supplemental funds for SFY 2020 and to increase its annual appropriation to \$400,000 for SFY 2121 so that West Virginians with catastrophic illnesses who are without other resources will receive the life-saving treatment they need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jacques R. Williams".

Jacques R. Williams, Esq.
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julie C. Palas".

Julie C. Palas, J.D.
Executive Director

Since 2000, the James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission (Commission) has provided lifesaving interventions to more than 1,544 West Virginia citizens. The Commission is a last resort for those in dire need of medical assistance where the risk of death is imminent and no other resources exist. The volunteer Commissioners are appointed by the Governor. The Commission is comprised of a doctor, lawyer, social worker, nurse, and two citizens, all of whom work to determine eligibility for assistance. The state receives their expertise at no cost.

The Commission makes direct payments to providers through the West Virginia Medicaid program (Medicaid) for individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid benefits, yet still cannot afford to pay for costs associated with catastrophic illnesses. As many West Virginians live just above the federal poverty level, they cannot afford private insurance and are not eligible for state assistance.

Prior to approving an application, the Commission’s Executive Director consults with Medicaid and hospital charity care programs to determine if applicants are eligible for those programs. Before receiving assistance from the Commission, an eligible applicant must apply for and be denied coverage by Medicaid and must attempt to obtain insurance coverage through the Marketplace Exchange Program of the Affordable Care Act or through private insurance options.

Assistance includes lifesaving medical treatments and related travel costs. Assistance is capped at \$200,000 for medical services and \$5,000 for transportation costs. Examples of covered expenses include:

- Proven and accepted medical procedures such as surgery, organ transplants, and chemotherapy;
- Medication that prevents rejection after a transplant and/or recurrence of a life-threatening illness; or
- Gasoline, lodging, airfare, and/or car rental costs to medical facilities for patients to receive treatment or for related doctor appointments.

Along with direct financial assistance, the Commission assisted 148 individuals in 2019 with additional services including referrals to other programs. Some of these programs include the American Cancer Society, Angel Flight, hospital financial counselors, regional community action agencies, local cancer assistance programs, prescription drug discounts, and online medical co-payment assistance services. By working with these partners and their available resources, the Commission preserves more of its own funds for client assistance services.

A key objective is to leverage scarce resources for maximum benefit.

*By paying at Medicaid rates, the Commission pays only 20 - 25 cents for every dollar billed to the Commission for providing lifesaving care to a West Virginia Resident thereby leveraging its resources for further use. **Not only does the Commission save lives, but it saves money.***

Examples of assistance in 2019

- 56 year-old male with liver cirrhosis needed a transplant, received secondary insurance coverage and travel assistance
- 27 year-old male with testicular cancer received travel assistance to treatments
- 57 year-old female with lymphoma received medical treatment and travel assistance
- 50 year-old female with lung and throat cancer received transportation to chemotherapy treatments
- 66 year-old female with breast cancer received treatment
- 80 year-old male with leukemia received travel assistance to treatments
- 59 year-old male in need of a lung transplant and travel assistance

General revenue funds of \$101,005 were allocated to the Commission for SFY 2019 by the West Virginia Legislature (\$105,695 for SFY 2020).

The Commission strongly recommends the Legislature provide an allocation of \$400,000 for SFY 2021 based on increased client medical assistance needs, more catastrophic claims, and increased demands on staff time.

James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Financial Snapshot: State Fiscal Year 2019		
Medical Claims Received from Providers	\$1,361,486 (approx.)	Increase of 100% from SFY 2018 (was \$677,365)
Medical Claims Paid by Medicaid on behalf of Commission*	\$282,964 (approx.)	Increase of 60% from SFY 2018 (was \$176,638)
Travel Costs Paid by Commission	\$13,191 (approx.)	Decrease of 244% from SFY 2018 (was \$32,253)

**Payment amounts do not include outstanding claims returned for corrections.*

Since October 1, 2015, the Commission has been able to reduce operation costs as the Executive Director has assumed the additional duties of the Executive Director of the West Virginia Women’s Commission. Salaries and office expenses are shared equally between the two bodies, and the Commission continues to consider additional measures to further reduce costs. With the rising number of people who seek assistance, the Commission’s work is more vital than ever.

As a §170(c)(1) governmental entity established for a charitable public purpose, the Commission can accept tax-deductible contributions, gifts, property, and grants from both private and corporate donors. The Commission is implementing a strategic fundraising campaign that includes requesting increased funding through the Legislature and will seek approval to share in various collected state fines and fees. Educational presentations and materials are provided at conferences, outreach events, and online to increase awareness about the Commission’s services for West Virginians with life-threatening illnesses.

The chart below identifies, by county, the West Virginians who received both in-kind assistance and financial assistance from the Commission in 2019. These numbers do not include individuals the Commission continues to assist from previous years or applications taken in December 2019. Applications taken during December could potentially add 12 clients, thus bringing the total for 2019 to 160.

James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Client Snapshot: State Fiscal Year 2019

County	#	County	#	County	#
Barbour	3	Kanawha	14	Pocahontas	1
Berkeley	4	Lewis	1	Preston	1
Boone	1	Lincoln	1	Putnam	5
Brooke	2	Logan	3	Raleigh	15
Cabell	3	Marion	3	Randolph	3
Clay	1	Marshall	2	Summers	2
Fayette	6	Mason	2	Taylor	1
Grant	1	Mercer	1	Upshur	1
Greenbrier	5	Mineral	1	Webster	4
Hampshire	2	Mingo	2	Wetzel	2
Hancock	2	Monongalia	4	Wood	7
Hardy	4	Monroe	6	Wyoming	3
Harrison	12	Nicholas	4	Unknown	7
Jackson	2	Ohio	1		
Jefferson	2	Pendleton	1	TOTAL	148

James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Members

Jacques Williams, Attorney, Chair, Monongalia County
Sandra Cotton, Registered Nurse, Monongalia County
John Davidson, Jr., Member-at-Large, Kanawha County

Patricia Davis, Member-at-Large, Hampshire County
Frances Roberts-Buchanan, Social Worker, Cabell County
Dr. Victoria Shuman, Physician, Greenbrier County