



James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission 2020 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, 2021

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

Members of the Legislature:

The James "Tiger" Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission (Commission) was created during the 1999 regular session of the West Virginia Legislature to act as a last resort for those in dire need of medical assistance during a life-threatening illness once all other resources are exhausted. The Commission's 2020 Annual Report is enclosed for your review.

The Commission's funds are at critically low levels, which required the Commission to start a waitlist in November 2019 for new applicants due to the amount of anticipated obligations for current clients. Over the past five years, the Commission has received an annual allocation of approximately \$100,000 to cover personal services, with any unused balance transferred to a special revenue account to assist eligible clients and pay operational expenses. The Commission's funds are projected to be exhausted during state fiscal year 2022 as client obligations will exceed the available cash balance.

The Commission is committed in its efforts to continue assisting West Virginians with catastrophic illnesses who are without other resources to enable them to receive the life-saving treatment they need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacques R. Williams".

Jacques R. Williams, Esq.
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "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 1,615 West Virginians. 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. By having a doctor, lawyer, social worker, nurse and two citizens at large 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 cannot afford to pay costs associated with catastrophic illness. Many West Virginians live just above the federal poverty level; they cannot afford insurance and are not eligible for state assistance.

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 attempt to obtain health insurance coverage through the Marketplace Exchange or private insurance options.

Assistance provided by the Commission 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; and
- Gasoline, lodging, airfare, and car rental costs to medical facilities for patients to receive treatment or for related medical appointments.

Through direct financial assistance and referrals to other programs, the Commission assisted 71 individuals in calendar year 2020. Partnering programs include the American Cancer Society, Angel Flight, hospital financial counselors, regional community action agencies, hotels with discounts for medical treatment, and local cancer assistance programs. Prescription drug discounts and online medical co-payment assistance were also utilized. By working with these partners and available resources, the Commission leverages additional funds for client assistance services.

A key objective of the Commission is to leverage scarce resources for maximum benefit. An example of leveraging can be seen in the Commission’s historical data: for every dollar billed to the Commission for providing lifesaving care of a West Virginia resident, the Commission pays only 20-25 cents by paying at Medicaid rates. Not only does the Commission save lives, but it saves money.

Examples of assistance provided in 2020:

- 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 for treatment
- 66 year-old female with breast cancer received treatment
- 60 year-old male with heart, liver, and kidney failure received medical treatment
- 62 year-old male with brain and lung cancer received medical treatment

General revenue funds of \$105,695 were allocated to the Commission by the West Virginia Legislature for personal services in SFY 2020 and again in SFY 2021, with the balance being used for clients’ medical assistance, related travel expenses, and operational expenses. The balance is not enough to pay the total amount of medical assistance needs annually.

The number of applications for assistance decreased by half in 2020, slowing when clinics and hospitals stopped referring patients due to the waitlist; however, the dollar amount of medical claims received by the Commission did not decrease, as demonstrated in the chart below.

| James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Financial Snapshot: SFY 2019 and 2020 | | |
|---|--|--|
| Medical Claims Received from Providers | 2019 \$1,361,486 (approx.) 2020 \$1,386,770 (approx.) | increase of 100% from SFY 2018 (was \$677,365) |
| Medical Claims Paid by Medicaid on behalf of the Commission* | 2019 \$282,964 (approx.) 2020 \$235,726 (approx.) | increase of 60% from SFY 2018 (was \$176,638) |
| Travel Costs Paid by the Commission | 2019 \$13,191 (approx.) 2020 \$15,898 (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 reduced operational costs as the Executive Director assumed the additional duties as the Executive Director of the West Virginia Women’s Commission. Salaries and office expenses are shared equally and the Commission continues to consider measures to further reduce costs.

As a 170(c)(1) government entity for a charitable public purpose, the Commission can accept tax-deductible contributions, gifts, property, and grants from both private and corporate donors. A strategic fundraising campaign includes requesting increased funding from the Legislature and 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 West Virginians who received both in-kind assistance and financial assistance from the Commission in 2019, and those who received in-kind assistance (37) or were waitlisted (34) for assistance in 2020. The numbers do not include West Virginians the Commission continues to

assist from previous years (21) or applications taken after December 2020. Additional applications taken during December 2020 could add 6 clients, thus bringing the total for 2020 to 77.

**James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Clients:
Calendar Years 2019 and 2020**

| County | 2019 | 2020 | County | 2019 | 2020 | County | 2019 | 2020 |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Barbour | 3 | 1 | Kanawha | 14 | 10 | Pocahontas | 1 | |
| Berkeley | 4 | 1 | Lewis | 1 | | Preston | 1 | |
| Boone | 1 | 1 | Lincoln | 1 | 2 | Putnam | 5 | |
| Braxton | | 1 | Logan | 3 | 2 | Raleigh | 15 | 3 |
| Brooke | 2 | | Marion | 3 | | Randolph | 3 | 3 |
| Cabell | 3 | 2 | Marshall | 2 | | Summers | 2 | 1 |
| Clay | 1 | 1 | Mason | 2 | 3 | Taylor | 1 | |
| Fayette | 6 | 6 | Mercer | 1 | 4 | Tyler | | 1 |
| Grant | 1 | 1 | Mineral | 1 | | Upshur | 1 | |
| Greenbrier | 5 | 2 | Mingo | 2 | 2 | Webster | 4 | 1 |
| Hampshire | 2 | | Monongalia | 4 | 4 | Wetzel | 2 | |
| Hancock | 2 | 1 | Morgan | | 1 | Wood | 7 | 1 |
| Hardy | 4 | 1 | Monroe | 6 | | Wyoming | 3 | 2 |
| Harrison | 12 | 3 | Nicholas | 4 | 1 | Unknown | 7 | 7 |
| Jackson | 2 | | Ohio | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Jefferson | 2 | 1 | Pendleton | 1 | | TOTAL | 148 | 71 |

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