

My name is Michaela Fissel and I am here to testify in opposition to the proposed cut of \$480,000 to DMHAS Young Adult Services. I hope that as I share my experiences as a young adult with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, I will provide meaningful evidence to support the need for specialized services that address the unique needs of young adults.

Throughout my childhood I struggled desperately to cope with my extreme emotional states. I attempted to self-medicate with drug use, self-mutilation, and with an eating disorder. As those around me watched as I dropped out of sports, isolated from childhood friends, and began getting in trouble with the police, these objective signs of distress were disregarded as adolescent rebellion. Thankfully, I had enough of an academic foundation to allow me to graduate from high school on time; however this was a mixed blessing.

Soon after graduating I cycled into severe depression and I attempted suicide. Unfortunately, I had no idea about mental health services and when I was evaluated in the ER, I simply lied to get discharged. Of course I convinced them I was fine; I had convinced myself that I could never tell anyone how I really felt because I was terrified that I would be labeled crazy.

At this point in my testimony it would be easy to categorize my experiences as an extreme case of bipolar disorder, however based on the research 6.5% of young adults throughout the nation experience symptoms of serious mental illness. Consider that in Connecticut that statistic more than doubles to 14%, and does not even include moderate symptom severity.

After being discharged I decided that the only way I was going to ever feel normal was if I enroll in courses at MCC. While I completed my Associates, I struggled with homelessness, addiction, and suicidal ideations; however education provided me with enough structure so that I could remain stable. Unbeknownst to my professors, employers, and fellow students, I was able to avoid my need for mental health services and I eventually graduated Cum Laude in the spring of 2007 and transferring to CCSU that fall.

Unfortunately, with the stress of changing schools I couldn't continue to hide my symptoms, and by mid-terms of my first semester I was psychotic once again, attempted suicide, and I was finally committed. After completing almost one-month of hospitalization I was introduced to DMHAS specialized services.

DMHAS offered me programming that exposed me to a new way of thinking, feeling, and living. I finally realized that I had control over the outcomes of my life if I took personal responsibility for my wellness. The most important aspect of DMHAS young adult services is that it offered me the opportunity to access services with other young people who were going through the same normative life changes as I was.

Since reaching recovery, I have been sharing my story as an advocate with the hope that I will inspire other young people who experience symptoms of mental illness to seek support because recovery is possible and more importantly, we can find purpose through our struggles.

As a graduate student, I completely respect the need to hold the system accountable, yet I request that you do not disregard the individuals that represent the data, which define those outcomes, indicators, and trends. After extensively reviewing the literature for my thesis, the consensus of researchers throughout the country is that young adults require developmentally appropriate services, which are tailored to their unique needs.

Isn't it wonderful that Connecticut is ahead of almost every other state in the nation? Why cut a program that is working? Almost three quarters of chronic, lifetime cases of mental illness are diagnosed by the age of 24. Please consider that young adulthood is the last opportunity for early intervention and with these developmentally appropriate services, mental illness does not need to lead to chronic disability. I testify before you today as evidence.

I am here today as an individual and as a representative of all young adults within Connecticut, to respectfully request that you do not support the cut of \$480,000 to the DMHAS Young Adult Services in the proposed budget.

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