

TESTIMONY FOR THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 22, 2012

Diane Frost

Opposing

H.B. No. 5014 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2013 (Department of Public Health)

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am a member of Keep the Promise Coalition Children's Committee, also known as KTP Kids. I am here today to ensure the success in school for all kids, especially the ones who may present more of a challenge through behavioral or mental health issues. Most of these children could and would be successful in school if the appropriate identifications, practices and interventions were in place. I am honored to submit this testimony for two reasons. One: to help children become whole and happy and two: to make my struggle worthwhile.

My name is Diane Frost. I am a 36 year-old Caucasian woman from Greenwich, Connecticut. I graduated from an out-of-state University and work as a peer-support specialist and case manager for a social service non-profit in Connecticut. I have been living with severe bipolar disorder since the age of four.

My family, a living parent and a sister would describe me as a vibrant, headstrong woman who doesn't give up easily. There is a reason for that. I survived years of mental and emotional pain hoping to smile again. That day has come. But that wasn't always so.

Now, I'd like to introduce you to the little girl whom I was. As a youngster I appeared sad, unpredictable and scared. I was. I spent days in school clinging to my studies as a means to fight my growing irrational fears, anxiety and violent mood swings. My relationships with teachers and especially peers were deteriorating. My family didn't know what to make of me, but an uncontrollable mess. I'm introducing you to this girl not for pity.

I strongly feel that the public school system needed to be there for me, as well as my parents, while I was struggling daily with the chaotic experience of mental illness. I was not abused by anybody. Instead, I was let down by an unequipped state system.

I only began treatment for the disorder at the age of 21. In years prior, I had been undertreated for a misdiagnosed moderate and then severe depression. Had it not been for my indebted referral to my first psychiatrist, by an astute teacher, I might not be flourishing today.

Both myself and my parents did everything right. They loved me and tried to help me with comforting hugs. Sadly, it wasn't enough. I needed, as a girl, professional help that I didn't get, plainly, until my health was broken and my spirit nearly gone with it.

Who knew that that an emotionally challenged, quiet, introspective girl could complete her homework well and cry while her schoolmates were playing? Is this difficult to understand? This was harder to live through and still find a bright light in my future. Luckily, I believed in improving my life enough to attend college in a far off city to seek the help that my parents didn't know was out there and the school system at large had not been equipped to handle.

The funding for School Based Mental Health Centers that was cut from the Department of Public Health's budget should be restored. The School Based Health Center (SBHC) model keeps students healthy and in school so that they can maximize their opportunities for learning. By increasing the presence of comprehensive SBHCs—those that provide both medical and mental health services—throughout our state's public schools, we can provide students with a reliable way of accessing mental health services and thereby improve academic performance as well as the overall well-being of our children.

I was fortunate enough to have a comfortable lifestyle and access to psychiatric care. Though my visits were expensive my parents made the stretch in the nick of time. I am grateful for such an opportunity in finding the treatment I so desperately needed. However, if today I was one of four million children living with a mental illness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999*) who rely upon state funded school programs; my every counseling session would be threatened with a premature end. Without a ready family income, resources are not secure and children are in fear.

It's about time that children do not have to suffer an enemy whom they cannot win over without help from the public schools' faculty and health staff charged with spending the majority of their day with and obviously fulfills basic rights of health and education.

I applaud that services now exist to bring a true deliverance from the reality I knew too well. The fiscal cuts being proposed to School Based Health Centers would set us back to years of childhood deprivation that our youth, and families, cannot afford. Please oppose the cuts to School Based Health Centers.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Frost