

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Budget

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Good evening members of the Committee. I'd like to speak about young adult services, the need for transitional services, and why I think this so important for our state. The need is greater than even five years ago. Instead of decreasing we need to increase these services. It will cost less money in the long run, because these kids will not need as much or any "entitlement" services. Difficult economic times have increased the need for mental health, addiction, and transitional services. I fully recognize that poor economic times create budget shortfalls. If we do not do something positive, we will be putting the burden on our children. What is more important than taking care of the next generation of teachers, doctors, lawyers, legislators...?

I have two wonderful, well-adjusted adult children. My son, Justin, is 25 and my daughter, Lindsay is almost (as she continues to remind me,) 22. My beautiful son has Asperger's Syndrome and mental illness. He is a kind, generous soul. My daughter has serious mental illness and probably some traits of Asperger's syndrome. Many siblings of people with Asperger's Syndrome have traits of the disorder.

My son received early intervention, starting in first grade. We had to fight for it, though. He was six when he started kindergarten, because we held him back a year, although he was already reading as a first grader and was starting to write and do math problems in his head. Although he started preschool around three, his social skills were lacking and he was beginning to show signs of the disorder. Parents know their child. I knew soon enough he was not a typical 1st grader and began looking for help. My husband and I took him for neuro-evaluation with an excellent neuropsychiatrist. We paid out of pocket for this evaluation. There were many disparities shown in his testing. He has a unique learning disability, resulting in a semblance of special ed services. To give the school system credit, they did reimburse us for the neuropsych evaluation.

Unfortunately, no matter how many PPT's I called and how often I was in the school, he received less than adequate service, not because the teachers and administrators didn't want to help my son, but there was not enough money to go around and he received less services for his needs. My son is incredibly bright. His fascination, begun early on, is computers. I often remark he can make a computer dance a jig. We made many requests for more testing and intervention. More research was needed for kids who have a diagnosis within the Autistic Spectrum.

Unfortunately, my son was misdiagnosed. We didn't know as much about the Autistic Spectrum as we know now. Simple diagnostic tools were not available to pediatricians and special education teachers at that time. He was not diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome until he was 16, when he was ready to drop out of high school. He was properly diagnosed and there were better means of intervention. We found him a placement at Bristol Tech, an alternative high school, and he received a fifth year of high school at Simsbury High. I'm very proud to say he finished High School. He is now 25 and is living an apartment with three of his friends. His social skills are improving. We were told, guys like Justin, tend to come around at about 24-25. My son, now on SSDI, has recently asked for help. With the help of DMHAS and BRS, I'm sure he can make the transition from SSDI to work. He needs transitional services to do so. I am very proud of my son. My son working, paying taxes and off SSDI will be good for the state.

As I stated, I have a 21 year old daughter with serious mental illness. In 5th grade she was bullied, unmercifully. She started to receive school and mental health services at around 13. She is quiet and unassuming. My daughter, three years younger than my son had the benefit of more research and education. In middle school, we were asked to attend a PPT where mental health services and special education for serious mental illness was offered. She also received in-patient and out-patient care. She refused to attend Simsbury High School, because she knew the bullying would continue. I find it exhilarating that there is now a national push to end bullying.

Her fascination is animals and everything agriculture. We found another regional high school for her at Suffield Agriscience Center. Not only did she get a great agricultural educational high school, she made truly good friends that

she still sees 2 years, after high school. She is now productive, happy, and a hard worker who is a respected and valued member of our community.

I am proud to say my daughter graduated high school and will start classes to become a Veterinary Technician in the fall. She is now doing an internship. She is an amazing advocate for her own mental health services. She see herself as a team member with a psychiatrist, therapist and has recently started OT for her serious physical sensitivities. She knows that nutrition and exercise are very important in recovery.

Lindsay now works as a Florist and is saving money to help pay for her education. She will be more invested in her education doing so.

Early intervention is what made a difference. Even though I had to fight for it, my children are living well because of early intervention. I have a good education in research and was able to advocate for my children. Not everyone has that skill set. Early intervention works! My children are living proof. We need to increase these services, not to decrease them. I wonder if my children had earlier and more intensive intervention, if they would have had much less of a struggle. We, as a family, spent an exorbitant amount of time fighting for services when we could have spent that time enjoying our children more.

Please do not decrease these services. School-based and family intervention works for these kids. They need to be increased. Early intervention saves money in the long run. Early services prevent more expensive adult services.

What is more important than investing in our next generation? Thank-you for your time.

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