

**PUBLIC HEARING RE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

Michaela I. Fissel
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Good evening respective members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michaela Irene Fissel, and I am a current resident of Windsor, Connecticut. I am here tonight to request that you support the increased funding for DMHAS Young Adult Services (YAS) presented in the Governor's proposed budget.

I am making this request based on the integration of my experience as a young adult in recovery from a primary diagnosis of bipolar disorder, as a behavioral health consultant that has connected with hundreds of young adults with our state, and as a graduate student that has spent the last three years reviewing the research related to young adults as a mental health service population.

Based on the research, it is reported that nearly 14% of young adults within Connecticut meet the criteria for a serious mental illness. This is supported by the estimate that there are nearly 10,000 young people within our state who are in need of DMHAS YAS. Unfortunately, the current infrastructure of DMHAS YAS only has the capacity to support 1/10th of this service population.

It is clear that young adulthood is one of the final stages of development that the opportunity for early intervention is still an option, given that three-quarters of chronic, lifetime cases of mental illness are diagnosed by the age of 25, the last year of young adulthood.

What does this mean for the nearly 9,000 young people who are not receiving the comprehensive and recovery-oriented services offered through DMHAS YAS?!

Based on my experience, it means that these young people will continue to live in desperation and despair as they attempt to manage the symptoms of their inadequately treated mental health diagnosis. That their lives will be marked by chronic disability that will inevitably place a further financial burden on our society.

Since achieving recovery in 2007, I have been working within the behavioral health field as a consultant, and through the various young adult initiatives I have had the opportunity to coordinate, it has become abundantly clear that young adults require tailored mental health services that not only address the process of recovery, but the greater transition into adulthood. The opportunity of recovery is made available through DMHAS YAS – that fact is reported by recipients of DMHAS YAS when surveyed by someone outside of the system.

I say that because there is a professional boundary that is created between providers and consumers, but as someone who is there peer, who has research training, when I ask them what was the program that most effectively supported their recovery, they said DMHAS YAS, without a doubt.

Young people of the current generation are in a unique position to catch up to the rest of the cohort. The problem is, without increased funding, the opportunity of recovery will continue to be made available only to a select few.

I can't imagine how my life would be if I didn't get the specialized services offered through DMHAS. I can say with confidence that I wouldn't be in my last semester of graduate school, I wouldn't be gainfully employed, and I wouldn't be happily married with two beautiful children. That is what recovery makes available to young people – the opportunity to live a life of self-defined purpose that is comparable to our "healthy" peers.

Given all that I have shared with you this evening, the need to expand services to young people who are not currently part of the system is a critical component that will address the unmet mental health needs of one of our most vulnerable assets - our emerging young adults.

I can only hope that you will make the opportunity of recovery available to every young person in the state of Connecticut, and support the increased funding for DMHAS Young Adult Services that is included in the Governor's proposed budget.

Thank you for considering my testimony.