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Testimony before the Health & Hospitals Subcommittee of Appropriations
Re: DMHAS Budget
Tuesday, February 18, 2014

Good afternoon/evening Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, and distinguished members of the Health & Hospitals subcommittee of Appropriations. My name is Paul Acker, Assistant Executive Director of Focus on Recovery-United (FOR-U), and co-chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition's Adult Committee.

I would like to encourage support for the Governor's proposal for 110 units of Supportive Housing, which includes 1.1 million in supportive services for scattered site housing and in RAP (Rental Assistance Program) vouchers. Having a safe and stable place to live is an important foundation from which people can build or rebuild their lives, and downright critical for people living with psychiatric disabilities. While some states have criminalized homelessness with their policies, states like Utah have found it cheaper to invest in supportive housing vs. paying the traditional unmet costs associated with homelessness, such as emergency care and criminal justice costs.

I'd also like to speak about Young Adult Services. We hear this term and we think it's about services for ALL young adults in the system, but it's not. This is specifically for those young adults transitioning from DCF to DMHAS care. Many more young adults experience their entry into the system around the 18-25 year old period in their life and need specialized services to help them become healthy, productive adults quickly. Another misconception is that Young Adult Services are available statewide, but not every agency is funded to provide Young Adult Services. The investment in these services now can pay great dividends down the road through healthy, productive adults in our communities.

Peer supports, having a paid, trained person with lived experience working alongside someone, have been shown to be very effective in helping someone to recover. It is a great augmentation to traditional mental health services. When I was a young adult struggling with mental health and addiction issues, the messages I received were all about "treatment compliance" and learning to adjust to a lifelong disability. Everything was a "symptom". They didn't tell me that I'd be living a life of isolation and poverty, not a very good place for "recovery" to happen. The unique messages peer supports bring

are: finding your own path of recovery and setting your own goals, messages filled with mutual support, hope and empowerment. I can only speculate about the difference having peer supports in my life would have made, but instead of waiting until my 40's, I might have re-joined the workforce and a satisfying adult life much quicker with Young Adult Services and peer supports in place.

Finally, Thank you for the investments that the Governor and the legislature made last year that promoted wellness, self-sufficiency and hope for people with lived experiences. When we smartly invest our money into services that respect the dignity and rights of human beings, they tend to respond in kind. Thank you for your time.