Good Evening. I am Heather Gates, President/CEO of Community Health Resources (CHR). CHR is one of the largest and most comprehensive providers of behavioral health, integrated care, supportive housing and foster care in the state. We employ 900 staff from a wide variety of disciplines. We are devoted to serving those most in need utilizing evidenced based practices to deliver high quality care and achieve excellent outcomes.

We served over 26,000 children, families and adults last year, an increase of 2,200 from the previous year and an increase of 8,800 or 50% since 2014. Much of the increased demand for services in the last three years has been related to the opioid crisis. Unfortunately, during this period of time we have experienced deep cuts, 12.5%, from the DMHAS as a result of cuts to their grant accounts. Most recently, we were informed that a small amount of funding that was restored by the legislature for this fiscal year, would not be distributed. We had already restored several staff positions including a position to facilitate rapid entry into substance use treatment services. These will need to be eliminated yet again.

Although the budget as presented by the Governor is relatively flat funded, it is built on a base that has been dramatically cut over the past 8 years. The DMHAS substance use and mental health services grant accounts have been cut by 17.5% during this time. This funding supports services to those who have the most serious mental illness and substance use disorders. They have no other options. These cuts are exacerbated by the inadequate Medicaid rates for behavioral health services. We are faced with the choice of losing more and more money every year or restricting access to care by reducing staffing. This is not an acceptable choice for any provider of care.

We support the proposed inclusion of the 1% cost of living adjustment as well as the proposals to convert state operated services to private non-profit. However, any savings from these efforts need to be directed back into the service system along with additional funding to support the cost of care. We can no longer compete for qualified staff without additional funding.

Thank you for listening to my testimony.