Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Tera Esposito and I am a newly hired Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I came to DMHAS from the private sector and it is my experience that the care we provide with the state is more comprehensive. I have the flexibility to run groups and I work with patients one on one if they are not feeling well enough to attend groups.

In the private sector, the productivity requirements are: 90% treatment hours, 10% note taking, documentation and prep. These requirements force workers in the private sector to cut corners by using time allocated for working with a patient for taking notes – this is referred to as “point of care documentation.” This means if I’m seeing a patient for an hour, I’m expected to take notes on client progress during the session, which is a safety hazard and takes away from the quality of care I’m able to provide for the patient. These productivity requirements are a breeding ground for unethical practices and for patients to get hurt. The turnover and the rotating case-load assignments in the private sector mean there is no continuity of care, and a true lack of time to prepare sessions so we can meet patient needs appropriately. Without continuity of care, especially with psych patients, there is not enough rapport built which yields decreased participation in treatment and longer hospitalizations.

Here at DMHAS patients need time with therapy staff, and we’re able to build rapport with each patient before they consistently participate in groups. We are able to conduct one on ones with patients to form a therapeutic relationship. We get the time we need to go through the patient history to understand their individual trauma and diagnosis. Effective COTA work requires constant collaboration and communication with the treatment team, which is not possible in the private sector.

Connecticut Valley Hospital used to have 19 occupational therapists – that has decreased to 7 today. DMHAS needs more funding – not budget cuts – to restore our rehab departments and provide the best care to our patients.

Thank you for your time.