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LaTonya Hurst, Mental Health Associate
Dutcher Service, Whiting Forensic Hospital
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is LaTonya Hurst, and I am a Mental Health Associate with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). I have worked at Connecticut Valley Hospital for 12 years.

DMHAS needs more funding for staffing. Funding cuts mean patient care suffers. In my time at DMHAS the patient population has dramatically changed – patients are more acute, exhibit more aggressive behaviors and experience more delusional episodes. We need more staff to be able to provide quality patient care. More staffing means that we can be more interactive with patients mentally and emotionally.

Currently, because so many of our patients are on special observations & staffing levels are so low, the staff who are not assigned to specific patients can only do the bare minimum of patient care. We can’t always guarantee fresh air breaks – which are a human right – we can’t always open the laundry room when patients have time to do their laundry. We would like to be able to take our patients on outings to help their reintegration back into the community. With low staffing levels, that is harder and harder.

Our facility provides wrap-around services – patients have access to: a hair salon, dialysis, dental clinic, boutique, X-RAYs, eyeglasses and lab draws all on our campus. Funding cuts mean our patients suffer. We used to have Valley View – a café on campus that offered jobs for patients and an outing opportunity – our patients learned etiquette, got to leave the unit and meet their doctors, and provided an opportunity for our patients to earn money & learn the skills they need to transition out of CVH successfully. Cutting funding means cutting patient vocational activities. Our facility is a treatment facility, but reintegration to the community is lacking now.

DMHAS needs more resources for staffing. Because of the lack of staff and rising acuity in the facility, we had 140 workman’s comp injuries just in 2018. There are 400 people working in my division. 140 injuries is a fourth of our workforce. Increasing DMHAS funding is a matter of human rights & safety – for our patients and for the staff.

Thank you for your time.