Good evening Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Debra Vining. I am from Willimantic and Susan Johnson is my state representative. I am a member of The Lighthouse, a clubhouse which is part of the United Services and Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP). I am an advocate for people with mental illness.

I am asking for more money in northeastern Connecticut for the clubhouses. The northeast region receives 1/16 of the money that the rest of the state receives. Several clubhouses have had to close because they don’t have enough money to keep their doors open.

The clubhouses offer gym membership, groups to attend (wellness, social awareness, art, spirituality, yoga, and journaling), trips, healthy lunch, NAMI support group, domestic violence support group, interaction and socialization with peers.

There is a long history of drug addiction in my family which my family has had to deal with. I suffer from depression, anxiety and PTSD all due to childhood trauma. I started cutting myself at the age of 12. My family isn’t supportive to me because I have a mental illness. They are so used to dealing with drug addiction they either don’t want to or can’t deal with me. My family is a trigger for me. They are a major part of my stress and depression. The Lighthouse is a sanctuary for me. The staff and the members of the Lighthouse are now my family. Without the staff and members of the Lighthouse I would be by myself with my mental illness. I would isolate and become depressed, cut myself and eventually kill myself.

When people attend clubhouses they will isolate less and not as apt to commit crimes. Clubhouses help the members become more independent. If this request isn’t granted, it will cost the state more money because more people will need to be hospitalized.