

Budget Testimony 2/9/15

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Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak for a few minutes on the slated changes in funding in the proposed budget for FY 16. I would like to start off by recognizing the tremendous amount of work that is put into this process. I know that it is not easy to build a budget during tight economic times, and when budget deficits are to the extent that they are currently in the State of Vermont, your jobs are much more complicated. And given that, I thank you for allowing us to provide you with information and testimony, so that you can make decisions based upon the most information possible.

As Director of Child and Family Services at the Clara Martin Center, I oversee the Transitional Age Youth Programming. It is with this programming in mind that I feel the need to talk about the multitude of services that will be affected by some of the proposed cuts. Two areas that may not necessarily seem relevant to this population as they are not designated as such, but will have grave effects on the TAY population are the cuts to the DMH housing vouchers, and cuts to the Criminal Justice program. As I am sure you know, the TAY population has been a segment of the population that previously fell through the cracks of service delivery per se. TAY young adults aged out of Children's Services and their needs could not be adequately met through the Adult system of care. However, we have made huge strides in our work with this population with the help of the SAMSHA Youth In Transition grant, and the continued partial funding in FY 15. We were all very grateful for the support in the FY 15 budget, and thank you for that! However, with part of the YIT funding slated to be cut (1/4 of the budget allocated last year) the cut in DMH housing vouchers will dramatically affect these young adults that are already struggling in an environment that has limited affordable housing, but also are struggling with obtaining employment, and having access to all the support services that are needed. This is a population at risk, and the inability to have stable housing, a necessary basic need for all human beings, only contributes to increased risk.

In addition, the cuts to the criminal justice programs will only serve to continue to widen the separation between the Mental Health system and the Criminal Justice system. Programs that worked with the Mental health system to provide collaboration and treatment, are likely to be cut, thereby eroding not only the direct link to the Mental Health System for the inmates, but also for the system that works in collaboration with their children and family members. As young adults move from the criminal justice system, my concern is that the connections and the treatment for the much needed support services will be delayed and or be an obstacle that is just too difficult to surmount. Combining housing problems and reduced rehabilitation services within Criminal Justice Programming with the already reduced support services available as a

result of cuts in the Youth in Transition funding can only result in putting an already vulnerably population at an even higher risk level.

At the Clara Martin Center, we understand the incredibly complex needs of the Transition Age Youth population, and have worked very hard to combine the services that will best support these young adults in everything from obtaining employment, housing, re-entry services for those returning from the Criminal Justice System, mental health therapeutic services, substance abuse services, case management and support services in programming designed to not only meet their needs, but to also be appealing and engaging for young adults that have difficulty engaging in cookie cutter services. This means that we do everything possible to meet the young adults “where they are at” and engage them in the services they need so they can succeed and be productive members of our Vermont Community. While we have been creative and flexible, in our methods to be able to provide all of these services, continued cuts will make this much needed service delivery impossible. Because of this, I urge you to restore the \$500,000 in the budget for DMH housing vouchers, and to not make cuts to the Criminal Justice Program. This population, that is our future, is incredibly at risk, and further cuts will only negatively impact this population, and increase the risk for these young adults. It is our goal to be able to report outcomes of our work with our clients to you in RBA reports, and to be able to answer the questions: How much did we do?, How well did we do it? and Is anyone better off?, with positive reports and outcomes. Please help us to be able to achieve our goal, as we cannot do this without funding.

Thank you for your time, and the opportunity to speak about the effects of these propose cuts.