

Testimony

Mental Health Advocacy Day

My name is Cathleen Francis and I am from Essex, Vermont. I am the mother of a son who lives with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, anxiety, and depression. My Husband is a State Employee as a Firefighter. I work with children and families in multiple roles, including at a non-profit and as a registered home childcare provider. I am here to share my son's story and to ask you for your support in preserving mental health services.

My son was toddler, when I began noticing that he was struggling getting through the day and night more than typical. We went for years without sleep due to his obsessive need to get up multiple times in the middle of the night and check his room, bed, and body for insects, and dirt. During the day, he refused to eat, drink, and sleep.

I contacted my pediatrician after six months of struggling to help him ourselves. She shared our concerns and directed us towards supports. This placed us on many waitlists that were supposed to give us answers to the questions, "why is all this happening? And how do we help him?"

We were able to get answers in his Primary Care office with an experienced child Psychiatrist. That day changed our lives because we had knowledge about the why and a plan moving forward to help him.

After six months on multiple wait lists, we received support within our home to help him learn to manage his emotions, and fears. We were able to start to feel a sense of normalcy within our family dynamics. Colin started slowly communicating his fears, and needs with us. Over time, he was able to eat a variety of foods that were outside of his own restrictions. He started preschool that January along with his peers.

The challenges over the last few years have included not qualifying for certain services due to our medical insurance. We have applied for additional insurance to be turned down because my son has a high need, but not a high enough need to qualify. This is challenging when you feel like you have used up all your resources and there are none left unless there is funding for the program he needs. Children in Vermont should be able to have access to services available to those who are not on Medicaid. I understand that it is complicated and there is no short term way to fix this.

He is currently in first grade with minimal support within the classroom. He does have a Mental Health Clinician that works for our local Direct Agency. She is essential to his success and is his greatest advocate.

Young children and their families in our communities are struggling with a mental health illness. We must continue to be able to fund these services accessible to families who need them.

Thank you.