

February 10, 2020

Testimony to the Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations

I would like to thank each of you and all our dedicated legislators for the support you have provided to our community mental health system, which has made a difference in the lives of so many.

Act 82, passed in 2017, states, "Vermont's mental health system shall be adequately funded and financially sustainable to the same degree as other health services." It further states that rates of payments for our system should be reasonable and adequate to achieve the required outcomes for designated populations and that "rates should include a cost adjustment factor that reflects changes in reasonable costs of goods and services of the Designated and Specialized Service Agencies." If the outcomes we hope to achieve are to keep people off the streets - housed and warm, out of jails and not caught in the criminal justice system, to keep kids in our communities and out of State custody, to keep people out of the ER unnecessarily and out of costly institutional care, then we need to adequately fund our system.

The designated community mental health agencies, and certainly HCRS, have been managing our operations well, but as a business we need to be sustained. Our business is keeping people housed, employed, and connecting to our communities as meaningful and active participants. We are about giving people with mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities hope and providing services that reflect the dignity and respect that is the right of any citizen whether it is you, me, our family members, or neighbors.

We can only accomplish this and continue to provide this safety net if we have the financial support to pay our staff adequately, to maintain our benefits, and fund the kind of creative and innovative services that people in our community deserve.

We are asking for an increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates of 3% and to ensure that new DS caseloads are funded so that young people graduating from high school can get the services they need to succeed.

Our system serves over 35,000 of the most vulnerable Vermonters and provides work to over 13,000 people. I am proud to say that I have been a witness to the passion, hope, and compassion that drives the work of our staff and yet know that our services are fueled by funding. We need a system that is not "living on the edge" but is stable and secure, so when the time comes – our citizens know we are here to support them in times of need.

Respectfully submitted,

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