

February 25, 2019

Testimony to the Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations

Our system is at a crossroads. With payment reform and health care system reform we have many challenges before us. We are finding ways to integrate our community mental health system into our health care system, recognizing that the mind and body are inextricably bound and influence each other.

HCRS has been working with our many community partners to address barriers to access treatment and the social factors that impact well being – homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, transportation, unemployment, and the critical need for social connectedness.

We are having a crisis in recruitment and retention of staff. The increases over the last two years have made a difference, however, our rates do not support the salaries needed to attract and keep staff. This has a very direct impact on our ability to serve our community, which is at the core of our work. Turnover impacts continuity of care, the relationships that lead to real therapeutic change, and people having hope for the future.

To continue our work and address all these issues, we need a proactive multiyear investment to support our under-resourced system. We ask for a 4% increase for our community mental health system. These funds would go to support staff salary increases and health care insurance increases, all of which increase year after year. The costs of an electronic medical record (EMR) and maintaining or creating new programs are all necessary and require funding. This would be an investment for our future – to reduce costly inpatient psychiatric bed stays, reduce ER visits, and keep people out of jail. Crisis stabilization programs like Alternatives save money and keep people in our communities (see Alternatives one-pager).

Mental health, substance use, and developmental disability services funding should no longer be a 2nd class citizen relegated to the back of the bus when we know these issues and the many social factors we impact actually drive the bus. We should take our rightful seat in the front of the bus as Rosa Parks taught us many years ago.

Once again, thank you for your dedication and support of our system.

Respectfully submitted,

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