

**Testimony for Public Hearing on the Governor's Recommended FY 2022 State Budget**

February 8, 2021

Jenny Beaudin

Hello.

My name is Jenny Beaudin.

I work for Clara Martin Center in Randolph. We are a designated mental health agency for Orange County. We offer mental health, counseling, and treatment services for adults and children throughout our very rural county. We are an independent agency with oversight by the State and we rely heavily on state financial support to run. That is why I am testifying today.

I've been with the agency for a little over 5 years and work primarily with men and women who are mandated to attend treatment and/or therapy. This includes domestic violence and sex offender treatment and treatment for substance use disorders. Currently, I am a clinician and serve as the agency's Medication Assisted Treatment Coordinator working with our psychiatrist and nurse to manage a group of clients who use Suboxone to maintain their abstinence from opioid use.

The clients that we serve come from all kinds of backgrounds and working in community mental health provides me with a clear link to what is happening in my community. The people we work with have endured devastating and often complex traumas. They are persevering through poverty, physical and mental illness. They are addicted to heroin. They are trying to get through law school. They are grieving a loss. They are serving probation sentences. They are trying to patch up marriages. They are trying to find safety. They are in need of support and validation of their lived experience.

I'm testifying today because I believe strongly in the importance of community mental health agencies like Clara Martin Center. They are integral to offering wrap around support and coordinated community care for some of our most vulnerable populations. And the demand for our support has only increased with the pandemic.

That said, the work is hard and draining. And despite working in an environment that offers support and compassion from supervisors and peers, our staff turnover remains high. This has a sometimes devastating effect on our clients and a moral effect on our staff. Our staff leave because they are tired, overwhelmed, and under-resourced. They leave because the work is difficult. They leave because they aren't making a livable wage. And currently, our staff are burnt out and overwhelmed even more with COVID-19. Furthermore, many of us are carrying sizable student loans, are raising families, attending to illness, and trying to get children through college. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to do that on a one-person income at a not for profit, designated agency.

Personally, I am lucky enough to have a partner who also works and is compensated appropriately. I have two master's degrees and am certain that I could earn significantly more working for the state, for a private provider, or in private practice. And frankly, when I first began my master's degree for counseling, I expected to go into private practice as soon as I was licensed. However, after working with Clara Martin Center and being part of this team, my goal is to continue working in this role for as long as I can because I believe strongly in the work that we do and the necessity of that work. What we do is social justice work. We provide refuge for people in need, no matter what. It is vital and it is necessary, and I ask that you all consider supporting the work of Designated Agencies with financial resources that reflect the importance of the work we do.