

Appropriations Committee
Testimony of Paul Acker
in support of HB-5005, DMHAS budget
February 21, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Paul Acker I am the Senior Policy Advisor for Advocacy Unlimited, a registered voter from the town of Portland, and a member of the Keep the Promise Coalition. I am here in support of the governor's proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

While the budget is flat funded, I am encouraged by seeing \$3 million specifically to assist in the discharge of persons who are in state hospitals. People ready for discharge should not have any barriers to returning to the community makes this line item important. With this money, 20 people will have the opportunity to find their valued role in the community.

For many of us, myself included, finding these valued roles serve as a foundation on which people can build their lives on. To enable a person to transform from living in the community to having a full life in the community is a crucial. Many people find employment in a peer support role meaningful and we must work to increase that opportunity, not as an inexpensive labor force, but as an invaluable asset to help aid in another's healing. We as a society must understand as well, the peer support roles are not the only role persons with lived experience in the mental health system want to fill.

Unfortunately, many in our community have lost highly valued roles with the change of the RACs and Regional Boards into Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations. Many people had valued roles serving on the Catchment Area Councils where they would meet monthly and discuss systems issues. They would participate in the review and evaluation of services in their region. Giving them a voice into the service system and giving the system a look at itself through the eyes of the people who use them. This is no longer the case.

Many people attended the January State Board meeting to express this loss of their voice. It was the most well attended board meeting I have seen in years. DMHAS heard those people and found some money to help this situation, but it in no way returns the full function our community seeks. We are hoping the legislature will in coming sessions take a look at this and help restore not just these valued roles, but the voices of service recipients to the design, implementation and review of all the services they receive.

Thank you for your time.