

**Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee**  
**February 21, 2020**  
**DMHAS BUDGET HEARING**  
**H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING**  
**JUNE 30, 2021**  
**Denzel Closs:**

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am a 25 year old man who was diagnosed with Autism when I was a 15 year old teenager. My mom would take me to events to connect with people who had the same dx as I do. In the beginning I remember finding out that I had it since I was a child. As I was growing up, I was an outsider, and no one wanted me around much. I fell into a deep depression. I kept wondering why I was so different from everyone else.

After graduating high school, I started looking for a job and Easter Seals found a job for me through doing a working interview- which is a service which has been cut in the budget cuts over the previous years. They helped me with everything so that I could get a job and keep the job. I wish that service was around for others because many of my peers with similar diagnoses do not have that opportunity, and I have been employed ever since I received that help. Still my mental health was suffering. I attempted suicide at 21. My mom started putting the pieces together, and got the help in January 2016 after being taken to the hospital. They were able to get me on the proper medications to help with the depression which was causing me to lose the one thing I always had- happiness.

I remember spending 4 nights in one hospital, and then I was moved to another for rehabilitation with InterCommunity. I had something that was called schizoaffective disorder as well. My life changed for the better after I started engaging in rehabilitative services and behavioral health. I am currently involved in the Common Ground Learning Center and Social Rehabilitation Club. I was able to learn to socialize, gain confidence, learn coping skills, positive thinking, and meditation. I was no longer the outsider. Now, I share my poetry at many of their events, as well as the open mic nights at the East Hartford library. I like that everything is going well with no drama. All my basic needs are being met, and I'm an active working member of my community. I am registered to vote in East Hartford.

I thank the governor for keeping the budget intact, however, I would hope that the services that helped me would be funded again since they were critical in getting me on my feet and becoming the man that I am today. I am proud to be where I am at today. Not only am I proud, but I am thrilled that I am getting out into the community more. I found my happiness again. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Denzel Closs

East Hartford Registered voter.