

Senator Osten, Representative Toni Walker, and respective members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Patricia Young and I live in Newington, Connecticut. I am the Program Manager of the Emerging Adult Initiative Join Rise Be, a statewide peer-run initiative run through Advocacy Unlimited. Our mission is to share our experiences to influence change at the local, regional, and state levels, connect with our peers and community partners to reduce discrimination against young people, and to help cultivate the belief that recovery is possible and we all have the capacity to achieve success.

I have been living a life of self-led and peer inspired recovery from alcoholism, depression, sexual trauma and anxiety since 2005. For the last 7 years, I have been an advocate for those who have suffered cumulative trauma at the hands of sex traffickers.

I am submitting this testimony online in support of the Governor's proposed budget regarding the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

Alternatives to traditional clinical care are paramount in the healing process for those who have survived the unspeakable horrors of human trafficking. Community based peer led programs focusing on creative expression with an emphasis on being seen, heard, and valued, are core stepping-stones for the uphill battle of emotional and mental health after enslavement. The exploitation and repeated suffering endured by those being trafficked, causes long-term psychological, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual damage, which must be handled with alternative approaches in addition to clinical care.

Throughout my own recovery, time and time again, it is the connections I make with empathetic peers that prove to be more grounding than any prescribed medication. When working through anxiety, fear and PTSD, my survival is contingent upon a multitude of practices such as, Emotional Freedom Technique, physical fitness, music, faith and processing and expressing emotions with Nonviolent Communication. Had I found a peer based young adult support program when I was struggling in my 20's, my life would have been on track much quicker which would have paved the way for a more stable future.

Regardless of one's background, mental illness and mental health must be nurtured with an eclectic holistic approach, including but certainly not limited to what works for me personally. Whether a person's mental health has been affected by sex trafficking, addiction, childhood trauma or something less subtle, the fact remains there is a need for diverse resources, which should increase not decrease.

I implore you to protect funding for peer recovery services within the DMHAS budget, and I ask that you encourage DMHAS to expand funding for supports beyond clinical intervention.

If you would like to follow up please email me at pyoung@joinrisebe.org.

