

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 21, 2020
H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Autumn Bouchard, and I am here to testify regarding H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.

I too am here today to support and preserve the DHMAS grant funding for substance abuse and mental health services. This is a topic I find myself very passionate about, as Substance Abuse and Mental Health services have played a huge role in my life. I am a young, single mother who works full time to provide the best I can for my family. I am a friend, a homeowner, and a productive member in my community. I am not unfamiliar to hardship. I work full time as a Service Coordinator in the Community Support Program (CSP) at Reliance Health, connecting members with services needed to help them remain independent in the community. Most importantly, I am an addict in recovery. I say most importantly, because in order to see how far I have come, you would have to know how far I fell.

I grew up with a father who was an addict. I experienced significant trauma and abuse. I was 12 when I began drinking and experimenting with drugs. I thought I had found my answer. Alcohol made me feel "normal". It took everything away, and that numb feeling was the closest I had felt to joy in a long time. My addiction just progressed from there. I was 14 the first time I attempted suicide. I began what felt a lifetime of mental health treatment. I continued to be angry, depressed, and confused. Never feeling good enough, and never understanding what was really wrong with me. At 16, I was introduced to opioids after a very bad car accident. It didn't take long for the pills to take over my daily life. It also didn't take long for me to get introduced to heroin once the pills ran out. I was 19 when I went to my first inpatient substance abuse program at CVH. I remember waking up forgetting where I was for a few seconds. When it hit me that I was in rehab, I remember thinking to myself "How did I get here?" I cannot count how many times I woke up thinking that same thing. It took me many relapses, many bottoms, and countless substance abuse and mental health services to accept that I was an addict and I struggled with PTSD.

But it was within my first talk therapy sessions that I began the long process of healing. It was because of my state insurance that I was able to attend those sessions. It was because of the nonprofit organizations like Reliance Health that I was able to understand my PTSD. I was able to begin living, and it was so much better than just existing.

Our community and our members at Reliance Health have been devastated by the Opioid Epidemic. I am all too familiar with it myself. December 10th, 2018 I received a call from the Coroner's Office in California. They had found my brother overdosed in a hotel room. He was 33 years old and had been in recovery for longer than I had been. He was struggling with his mental health. March 9th, 2018, just 3 months later, I came home to find my roommate overdosed on my bathroom floor. I turned her over to try to perform CPR, but it was already too late. She was also in recovery and struggling. You see, my job is not just a job to me. It is a passion and a privilege. I am grateful for the opportunities to help as someone once helped me. I listen to my members. I relate to my members, and I do not judge. Instead I use my past and all that pain to

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share my hope. I try to advocate for the individuals who no longer have a voice, like my brother and my roommate. This April, god willing, I will celebrate 6 years in Recovery. I cannot put into words how important the funding is and additional funding would be. These services are necessary and lifesaving. Thank you for letting me share my story.