

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
David Olsen

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

My name is David Olsen and I am a registered voter in the town of Brooklyn.

I am here to testify regarding H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.

I would like to thank Governor Ned Lamont, Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiesicz along with my Senator Mae Flexer and Rep Patrick Boyd and all legislators of this committee for the generous opportunity to address the mental health needs of people. I would like to bring awareness to an issue that involves us all and our futures. The issue involves the foundation and viewpoints regarding children and adults with mental illness.

When I was in high school, I knew a classmate who found himself hospitalized for mental illness. The fact that he had sought mental health help spread quickly through the school. The students began to mock him by saying he was "nuts" coining the nickname "Planters". This shouldn't have been; he was humiliated for simply seeking the help he needed. I believe seeing someone experience such traumatic treatment can make other reluctant to seek help for a mental illness.

Years later while having these same stigmatized thoughts of mental illness ingrained in my mind, I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. On top of my illness, I felt ashamed and could not accept my new diagnosis. A flashback of that student caused me to want to avoid medication and treatment at first for my own mental illness.

As I tried to avoid the mental trauma and anguish that the other student had experienced, I instead turned to a pattern that involved years of substance abuse along with periods of not taking medications. My life consisted of this damaging cycle along with frequent periods of costly hospitalizations.

With the support of my family, inpatient hospitalizations, psychiatric services, case management services, social rehab programs, my religious faith and other community supports, I have since overcome substance abuse. As part of my recovery, I have had no hospitalizations for over 16 years. I have now come to the realization that mental illness is in fact a disease, just as cancer or diabetes is.

I hope my story emphasizes the importance of educating young people about mental illness. Not only an overview of the diagnosis but education on the behavioral aspects as well. The education should include that mental illness is a manageable disease that shouldn't define the way someone is treated. This education will include that hope and recovery are outcomes that are to be expected and not just maybe it will happen someday.

No one would make fun of someone with cancer; shouldn't the same apply to those with mental illness?? Even though one in five people have mental illness, most simply don't understand it. I struggled for years to develop my understanding. I hope that education and treatment will be available to children and their families when it is needed.

Politically, some have blamed mass shootings primarily on mental illness. I'm not agreeing, but wonder if the cause is more due to improper, or to the complete absence, of treatment. In a bipartisan manner, please think and contemplate all of these concerns and conclude that mental health education is a necessity for all – including school aged children along with their parents and legal guardians, young adults and elderly. I urge you to use existing funding for this purpose or if needed to enact new legislation to ensure adequate funding.

Let's educate people early in life to an understanding of mental illness that literally took me a lifetime of substance abuse and non-compliance of treatment to achieve.

Thank you so much for this time and God Bless you all.