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United for Quality Care

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Darnell Ford, Lead Children's Services Worker
Department of Children and Families
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Darnell Ford and I work at Solnit South Children's Psychiatric Center. I have been the Lead Children's Services Worker there for last 22 years. We work with kids who need support and services for their mental health when they are at the most vulnerable point in their lives.

Today I am here to demand that we expand DCF services. We shouldn't even have to demand, these should be basic foundational standards of care. This demand is a part of a package of demands that my union, 1199, is fighting for this year. These demands expand the healthcare services our communities – especially our communities of color - need now more than ever.

In DCF, we see firsthand what people call the “school to prison pipeline” that particularly impacts Black and brown kids. Which means that when my nephew leaves elementary school, there is a higher chance he is going to go down that pipeline just because of the color of his skin. Our society doesn't pay attention and we don't clear resources within his community to be able to make sure that we break that pipeline. To do that, DCF needs counselors working with communities and schools on a regular basis. There are already resource officers. Instead, double the amount of counselors. Break the pipeline. Train teachers. Hire more people who deal with mental and behavioral health far and above what is there.

You call me a hero, you call me an essential worker, and at times I feel like I'm helpless. Then you turn around and tell me that it's too expensive and we have to cut these services. I am not willing to stand for that. Today we demand massive investment in DCF services that kids need for preventative care.

Right now our nation is caught in multiple crises—from the pandemic to racial injustice to economic hardship. People are trying to survive; people are trying to figure out their lives, they are trying to know what's going to happen to them next week. They've lost their jobs, they don't have mental health, they don't have health insurance, and everyone is struggling to take care of their families. Instead of expanding our resources to help those in need, our Governor proposes cuts in services. This is unacceptable.

Expanding the safety net that we have is critical right now. We as DCF healthcare workers know what kids and our communities need – we need early interventions, training, mental health care, in schools and in communities. This all takes resources. Resources we HAVE, as the wealthiest state in the country. What we need is the courage to direct these resources towards expanding the services that our communities, our kids, need.

You know what you need to do. Thank you for your time.