

Chairperson Hackett and Co – Chair Tavares, my name is Cassandra McDonald, and I am here on behalf of Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality and I am asking you today to provide for more funding for mental health services and treatment within the budget.

It is imperative that funds should be allocated for an increase in subsidy towards mental health services to include, but not be limited to: Partial Hospitalization Programs, inpatient mental health treatment, prescription drugs, day group facilities, counseling and rehabilitation services, social service programs geared towards housing for individuals with chronic mental illness, and treatment services for individuals with co-existing mental health and addiction diagnoses.

As a former Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Therapist, I was often faced with the challenge of ensuring that my clients received the best treatment necessary for an improved quality of life. Unfortunately, there were times when I would reach a dead end, with no real resources available to assist them. Clients would frequently be turned away from receiving care because of an inability to pay, lack of beds for inpatient treatment, or insurance would only cover certain services like outpatient mental health counseling for a few days. Considering the fact that individuals live with mental health issues all or the majority of their lives, a few days simply is not enough. Even more detrimental, can you imagine being on the phone for what seemed like an eternity, talking someone out of committing suicide because they believed that the system had failed them? If you are wondering why they believed that, suppose that you were on the brink of a mental health psychosis and you were turned away from getting help because there were no beds available?

Currently, it appears that the focus of increased funding and change of law is targeted towards addiction treatment. As the drug epidemic is on the rise, no one can question why this is important. However, what we collectively as electors, legislators, and all other citizens are failing to understand is that approximately 1/3 of the population of people who experience drug addictions have a primary diagnosis of mental illness as reported by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI.

If you want to start decreasing the amount of casualties that have lost their lives due to alcohol and drug abuse, a good start would be to ensure that funding is readily and excessively available for mental health treatment.

I am again asking you with all sincerity that this budget provides for increased funding for mental health and treatment services.

Thank you all for allowing me to speak on this very important issue.