

Thank you Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am here today to share with you a little of my story. I had my first diagnosis at age 5. My supportive family continued to try to seek out solutions for me, month after month, year after year. This doctor in that town, that evaluation in this other town, this program in yet another town...none of them connected.

My middle-class family continued time after time to stretch their own resources.

There were costs from traveling expenses due to limited access to local services. Also from evaluations and treatments, not covered by private insurance. Such as paying \$300 a day, for a partial hospitalization program, and, just last month finally, paying off my 3-acute hospitalization stays, that occurred well over 3 years ago.

When I was fighting for my life, there was even a time when my parents considered giving up custody of me, so that I could access services through Medicaid that I **could not** access through private insurance.

Alone...my family was struggling to navigate the puzzle of my mental illness.

Not long into my freshman year of high school, I could no longer walk into my school building due to debilitating anxiety. The solution wasn't as simple as transferring to an online high school within the comforts of my home. During the height of my crisis, it didn't matter that I was labeled "gifted"...my brain was no longer able to function for learning. I needed specialized instruction in order to be able to access my education.

Although my recovery was not brief or easy, I am now learning to cope with my anxiety disorder. By becoming involved with my county's FCFC, I was able to access collaborative local wraparound care, including school-based interventions. I have also been able to access these supports without such a huge financial cost to my family.

As I am now academically and socially successful in high school, as I transition to college, I recognize the need to stay connected to my support networks and have chosen to remain "clustered" with my FCFC until I age out at 21.

In closing, there needs to be more support of funding for the treatment of youth from middle class backgrounds with private insurance, so that no parents have to make huge sacrifices such as selling a home or giving up custody of a child just to financially access mental health treatments. Additionally, peer support programs and school-based services need to be funded adequately so that youth can be successful at doing what they are supposed to be doing for their age, such as maintaining relationships with family & friends and learning in school. Let's spend the money for prevention rather than have families be forced to give up custody. Finally, I hope that my story helps everyone understand the importance of funding for Family and Children First Councils in order to ensure their ability to support multi-system youth and their families within the youth's local community. Thank you for taking your time to hear me today.