

Anna Stevenson  
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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Anna Stevenson. I am a current undergraduate student at Kent State University, though I represent myself. I am testifying to emphasize the utmost importance of allocating sufficient funds to mental health resources, specifically from the perspective of a college student.

I personally have a fairly extensive family history of mental illness. I've been aware of the struggles around it for pretty much my entire life, both from learning about my family history and through personal experience. It has colored the way I move through the world, knowing that many families have similar histories, often undiagnosed or unacknowledged. Seeing the struggles of those I love has made it undeniable to me that mental healthcare is an extremely important aspect of healthcare in general, and I mourn the loss of those who did not have access to the care they needed when they needed it.

Mental healthcare has been and continues to be inaccessible to many, either priced out of reach or obscured behind layers of stigma. Mental illness and mental health struggles are seen as shameful and taboo, demonized in the media and discouraged from casual conversation. This stigma is generational, often taught from parent to child.

The stigmatization of therapy and other mental health services is incredibly common, and often results in parents denying their children much-needed help because they don't believe in it. Depression and anxiety are seen as laziness and avoidance. Cluster-B disorders such as Borderline Personality Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder are dismissed as teenage volatility, and often punished as intentional defiance. ADHD, Autism and other forms of learning disabilities are dismissed as incompetence. Disorders involving psychosis, like schizophrenia, are demonized, and those who struggle with psychosis are often severely dehumanized.

I wish this dismissal of students' mental health was rare. I had so many friends in high school go without the support they desperately needed, either because their parents didn't believe in what they were struggling with, or because the cost of effective mental health services was too high. There is only so much you as a student can do to support your classmates- professional support is non-negotiable.

For many, college is one of the first times that these students have access to any kind of mental healthcare. These services are absolutely essential, especially in a high-stress transitional environment like college. Anti-suicide desk chairs in dorm rooms do nothing to quell suicidal thoughts- there has to be a proactive effort to support students as they experience adulthood for the first time. The way things stand right now, many college mental health services are overwhelmed with the need for support, and in desperate need of expansion. Having additional funding would make a world of difference for students all around the state.

I urge you to reconsider the House's decision to strike \$79 million from the budget going towards mental health services. These services are absolutely indispensable to higher education.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.