

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.

Affordable and accessible mental health resources are absolutely imperative for everyone. I am unfortunately very familiar with the consequences of inadequate mental healthcare. I learned about my aunt's suicide at a young age. I grew up with fragments of her around me- she was an artist, and we had her work displayed in various places around the house. At dinner, I would take the wooden apples she carved and roll them in my hands, wondering what it would be like to see her at family gatherings. I wondered if, as a budding artist myself, we could have been close.

My aunt grew up in a small Ohio town with parents who did not understand mental health, her mother struggling with it severely herself. She had access to some care for her more severe crises, but the understanding of mental illness at this time was not nearly as expansive as the care that exists today. Had she been in a place that was actually supportive to her, she may still be here today.

The mental health resources that exist in the modern day save lives.

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 that they were really struggling, 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 health care. 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.

I urge you to reconsider the House's decision to strike \$79 million from the budget going towards mental health services. These services are indispensable to higher education, and getting rid of them would be dangerous for students across the state.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.