

January 26, 2005

Chairperson Kaufmann and members of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services;

My name is Anne Tappe Scarff. I would like to address this committee about Children's Mental Health Services.

The adults of this state and nation have a responsibility to care for all children as if each child was their own.

It is difficult to accept that children can have a mental illness. But the reality is some do and we as a state and nation have to accept this fact and do the best we possibly can to take care of the needs of our children. It is of no consequence if the child is suffering a mental illness as a result of nurture or nature. What is of great consequence is whether we help our children when they are young, or wait until the likelihood of treatment for the illness will be less successful and more expensive.

Our family has been fortunate in receiving mental health services for our two children. Through Greg Daly, we met Cheryl Ronish and Dodie Hefner, two wonderful counselors in Helena. We were referred on to ICHS' (Intermountain Children's Home and Services) Day Treatment program. Some might say we were lucky. We were, but my husband and I also showed that we were in this for the long haul and that we were advocates for our children and we were willing to do whatever necessary to get our children the help they needed. All of us must be willing to do the same.

Our experience with ICHS has been a good one. We, in this state, are so fortunate to have a program of this caliber. The people involved in running the program, each and every one of them does their job with professionalism, kindness, and most important, love. We went into treatment as a family and the change the Day Treatment program has made for our child and family is just unbelievable.

Our oldest child attends the Day Treatment program. Our second child needs this program as well. Because of state and federal laws the school must follow my second child is not getting the mental health services he needs. The window of opportunity is closing for him.

We need to get our children help at a young age. We also need adults that will advocate for our children and help them through treatment so that in the future they can have a fulfilling life.

Our children, like many others in our state and nation have suffered from child abuse and are no longer able to live with their birth families. Not all children are able to live in a family. Some need to live in residential settings. For all of the children, they need intense therapy and a family that is willing to go through treatment with them. The result

is a real and forever, family. We need to make it a priority that our children have a safe place to be and to get all the help they need to achieve in life. If we do not care for the children, the pain will be immense for all of us. The children will not know how to deal with their pain so they will put society in pain. The next step for them will be a mental institution or prison or as in my children's case, the possibility of repeating the lives of their birthparents. Then society will have another generation of children that needs help. What generation is going to step up to the plate and do the right thing by these children: In the words of Bill Cosby," Before you say I can't do nothing with them... do something with them!"

The experience my family has had with the mental health services here in Helena has been positive. There are many people that take their job to heart and do a magnificent job. Our stumbling blocks have been financial and the red tape from state and federal laws. If we did not have Medicaid we could not afford to get the help our family needs. In addition because of state and federal laws my youngest child cannot go to the Day Treatment program at ICHS. He has to remain in public school because he is not acting out physically. He has not put the school or the system in enough pain. In the meantime, he is forced to live with his pain daily.

You have the great honor to have the State of Montana be a leader in the nation. Montana can be a good example to other states and help them build pilot programs based on ICHS' Day Treatment and PATH program.

I ask you now. What are your going to do?

Thank you,

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