

Dear Legislator,

I have been a recipient of mental health care provided by the state of Montana for several years and I write to you as both a consumer and a concerned citizen about possible changes this year during your legislative session. I am currently under the supervision of the DPHHS and reside at Warm Springs. I understand that it is typically customary to include your name and address in these letters, as well as sending the letters in a more timely fashion, but my decision to send this letter was overshadowed by a large degree of doubt that I should even become involved. As a result I do not include my name and my letter is likely late in its arrival to you.

Undoubtedly your subcommittee will be faced with several hard decisions, particularly where the budget and spending is concerned. I urge you to consider a few things that I have seen during my time involved with the mental health system.

The major issue in my mind is that a smaller amount of money spent now usually translates towards major savings later on. I have met several people, and I am one myself, who might have benefited from more available mental health care in the communities. This applies mostly to the smaller communities where such services are sorely lacking.

What money there is that is dedicated towards such services is greatly needed, and should under no circumstances be reduced. The spending that takes place outside of facilities, in the community, can save people untold amounts of hardships that might otherwise take place if the mental health services are unavailable.

Not only will these people and their families suffer from this decision, but the budget will as well, albeit at a later date and in a different division. If, for example, a person is unable to access sufficient therapy in the community and as a result attempts suicide, or commits a crime, or even simply quits their job and has a "harmless" mental breakdown, it will cost the State of Montana much more money to deal with this situation than if the person had simply been able to approach a mental health care professional and say "I need some help" and then get a positive reaction from a community based service provider.

I urge you to consider this, especially during your Overview of the DPHHS Budget, and the joint meeting concerning the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The services in the community aid thousands in their productive lives as citizens of Montana and to lessen the amount of care available to them would be a terrible thing.

Thank you for your time reading this, and I wish you all the best of luck and know that my prayers are with you during this important session of our state legislature.

Sincerely