

To: Representative Ron Ehli, Chair and Committee Members
Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, 2013 MT Legislature
From: Robin Johnson, 608 6th Ave. North, Great Falls, MT. 59401
Date: February 1, 2013
Re: Support for the AMDD budget.

My name is Robin Johnson. I am from Great Falls. I am Chair of the Cascade County Mental Health Local Advisory Committee. I am a board member on the Central Service Area Authority and the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Counsel. I am also the vice-president of Montana's Peer Network. I live with a mental illness and I am here to ask for your support for the AMDD budget.

After 20 years of numerous hospitalizations and failed employment opportunities, my recovery began in 2005. This is when I first heard that recovery was an option for people with mental illnesses. I began to work on my Wellness Recovery Action Plan or WRAP. With counseling and the support of others in recovery I went back to work.

I became employed as a Peer Support Specialist for the Center for Mental Health facilitating WRAP for others. In 2009, I created my own company and began facilitating WRAP and Illness, Management and Recovery or IMR with people on the Medicaid Waiver. These recovery services provide the tools and education helpful in creating action plans and setting goals. In four years, only three people on the waiver have needed psychiatric hospitalization. Two people are transitioning from Assisted Living Facilities into homes of their own at this time.

This work has been the key to my continued recovery. I now have meaningful relationships with my children and my grandchildren and I have friends. Other people living with mental illness will benefit from learning tools and receiving support from their peers. Continued recovery services such as WRAP and IMR and Peer Support will help others in their own recoveries.

Please support the AMDD budget which will provide for continued recovery services and Peer Support.

Thank you for listening.

Robin Johnson

To the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Linda Gonser and I am a member of NAMI and on the board of the Mental Health America of Great Falls. My husband and I are retired teachers. I'm also the mother of a 34 year old son who has lived with bipolar disorder since he was 27. I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health services.

My son was a national merit scholar and received a full ride scholarship to Oklahoma University. While there he graduated in four years with degrees in both Pre Med and Chemical Engineering. He was a member of the Rufneks, the student group that drives the Sooner Schooner during football games. I include his association with the Rufneks as he had an active social life and numerous friends prior to his diagnosis. Upon graduation he was a chemical engineer for Conoco and quickly rose to a management position with the company.

The first we knew he was having problems was when he called and said he couldn't get out of bed. The depression stage of bipolar and later the mania phase ensued. He was running naked in his neighborhood knocking on doors and saying he was a millionaire. Conoco sent him to the Menninger Clinic for treatment. Following his return and the side effects of his five new medications he lost all short term memory and was no longer able to function in his work position. He went through many moves and firings before we brought him home to Great Falls to live with us in 2007. Our lives have been a roller coaster ever since.

He attempted nursing school but after being a straight A student his whole life the best he could do with his short term memory loss was C's which was not good enough to get hospital placement for his final year. At that time he lost all hope and went off his medications and ended up in and out of jail, the hospital and eventually Warm Springs, the Montana State Hospital.

I greatly urge you to increase the Addictive & Mental Disorders Division (AMDD) budget which has had no additional funding for the last two years.

I also urge you to support the SDMI Waiver which allows for up to 800 persons diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar to move from the Mental Health Service Plan to Medicaid. We were paying over \$800 a month for my son's medications.

In addition, please support Goal 189 which essentially provides up to 90-days housing payments for individuals discharged from the Montana State Hospital. My son was put on a bus from the Montana State Hospital and dropped off at the Great Falls Rescue Mission without any notification to me or my family. We were out of town on vacation and he was unable to reach us. The Rescue Mission doesn't allow anyone in the building from 8am to 6pm so he was left to wonder the streets at a time when he was most vulnerable.

Due to lack of funding my son has not been able to get the support that he needs and deserves to become a contributing member to our society again. A strong mental health system will help children,

adults and families suffering with mental illness to get the care and support they need to experience recover.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I'm unable to travel and present to you in person as my son does not do well when I am not with him. I hope you will take my suggestions to heart.

Sincerely,

Linda Gonser
3912 16th Avenue South
Great Falls, MT 59405