

Testimony for FY23 Operating Budget
Connie Robinson/April 2022

Strong Body, Clear Mind, Better Tomorrow

Your Honorable Council members, I thank you for this opportunity to present my testimony. I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to the Community Advocacy Institute for their excellent Advocacy Training! Due to precious time restraints, I will get right to the focus of my testimony.

I am asking this Council and others, involved with addressing the dramatic increase in our most vulnerable, older populations suffering with mental health issues. I ask that you become the voice for those who have been caught up in the overwhelmed Mental Health system.

I am asking the County Council to provide founding for a special oversight committee to insure that the best therapeutic sessions and more innovative techniques are being administered. Provide professional therapeutic sessions that relate to patients age and personal mental health issues.

In 2020, I found myself dealing with my own Mental Health nightmare. Like millions of of people, dealing with the horrors of Covid-19 and its catastrophic effects, on our lives, in countless ways.

My illness began with variety of digestive system issues, possibly due to lingering effects, from contracting Covid, before the vaccine. I suffered daily chronic discomfort in my stomach and abdominal pain. Doctors and hospitals were overwhelmed, with saving lives from the deadly virus. This lead me on a a long painful search for a diagnosis and treatment.

I went through a countless number of tests, procedures, X-Rays and scans - an abundance of prescription, over the counter medications, 13 or more emergency room visits, three hospital stays! My mental health became adversely affected, causing bouts of anxiety and depression.

In a desperate need to find a diagnoses and treatment for my discomfort I ended up committing myself for a stay on a Behavioral Health Unit. As horrible as the experience was, some good came from it, I am speaking before

you, as an Advocate, for the patients, as well, as the overwhelmed professional staff members. They have to care for patients with a such a wide variety of mental health issues.

I can't forget the look of fear and sadness, in the patients eyes. We were, for the most part, walking, medicated zombies. It was mandatory, for us to participate in the daily therapeutic sessions, 3 and 4 a day! These sessions were to help us.

I often wonder if any of the patients were helped, after I left, or are they being released, like me because your time is up. I can honestly say, that I was not helped, I was instead released, with several prescriptions, 300 milligrams of wellbrutron, 50 milligrams of colonapine, Xanax(an addictive street drug).

Council members, I have a degree, in psychology and human resources. I have personally never needed any type of mental health treatment or medications. My background lead me to observe the patients and their some of their reactions to the therapeutic sessions.

I am asking that through the funds provided, there be stricter accountability and assessment protocol put into place. The results, success stories, and follow-up surveys should be evaluated by the professional committee. They could decide if more effective types of therapeutic sessions are needed. One's that would increase, more positive interactions and outcomes, for the patients.

In closing, I have spoken to you as an Advocate for the others, particularly at the older end of the spectrum, whom I spent a week in darkness with. The day I was released, several patients came to say goodbye. A guy named John was looking at me, with that sad lost, fearful look, in his eyes. He was to be released the next day.

John like many others wore the same clothes every day. He was so quiet, rarely speaking, unless, prompted, at the sessions. I asked was he ready to leave. I asked him, had any of the therapeutic sessions helped him, like the one where we waved colorful scarfs in the air, to sad music, or play on little instruments. He said not at all!

Honorable Council members, I would like you to imagine the sad and fearful looks in their eyes as they glance into a broken mental health system, finding themselves at the short end of the stick. Now, look into mine, as one of them who overcame so that I might address you, as their advocate.

" Most Human Beings will Strive after Something Better!"
Bishop Desmond TuTu

Thank you!