

Save Our Budget!

Hello! My name is Sarah Jacobs. I am an Assistant Director at a Residential Rehabilitation Program and I work with individuals who are diagnosed with severe, persistent mental illnesses and therefore classified as members of a vulnerable population.

Individuals who are vulnerable need extra care and support. They are not less than us and they are not less human; they simply need supports and assistance to be successful in the same ways that we are.

Programs like mine provide those supports. We have individuals on a daily basis who have to fight through their symptoms and fight through the stigma that gets thrust upon them in our society. They fight depression to wake up in the morning, they get out of bed and work to be productive, even though it can be physically painful to do so. They fight auditory hallucinations, voices in their heads telling them to give up, but they keep pushing forward. They work to overcome past traumas that may have been caused by their childhoods or adulthood, sometimes involving the very systems that are supposed to be set up to protect them. They fight through all of this so they can continue to live on and thrive and prosper and these programs help them do that. If they can fight so hard for themselves, then we should fight just as hard for them.

In order to fight for them, we need to have the funding to do so. We can't provide medication without the support of a nurse or trained medical professionals. We can't provide interventions to help them improve their activities of daily living without proper clinical training. We can't provide a safe living environment without the funding to keep those homes operating and ensure staff is present to monitor and support the individuals living there. We can't provide anything without appropriate funding. The majority of these items include food, water, and shelter, which are meant to be the most basic human rights, which everyone should be offered. Should they not receive the same?

Too often, we cut funding to programs that we don't value enough. Just because we don't experience these issues, it doesn't matter if other people have access to support that help them, right? For too long, mental health services have been associated with a stigma that has damaged the ability to get funding and in turn, damaged the lives of many individuals.

I have an individual in my care who has been in the hospital for years, expressed an extreme fear to return due to the conditions they had to endure while there, and works hard on a daily basis to ensure they are on the right path so they don't return. I have an individual who experienced his first mental health crisis and ended up in the hospital because of it. He lost everything due to something that was beyond his control at the time. Instead of giving up, he continued to push forward and strived to get his life back on track and was able to graduate from our program because of it. These are just a few small examples,

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many of the daily successes our consumers have can't even be measured because they are internal battles.

The best we can do is support them. We can give them the services they need to function and be productive, so that they can be in our community and be just as successful. We can set them up for success instead of failure. We can make true changes in the lives of many. However, we can't do that without the funding needed to maintain these programs.

Please consider these individuals while planning for the 2027 fiscal budget of the county. It is vital that we don't turn our backs on people who so desperately need a helping hand.