Testimony to the House Social Services Budget Committee

Testimony on
SRS Budget on Mental Health

March 2, 2011

Presented by:

Bekkah Sperry
University of Kansas
School of Social Work
Mister Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Bekkah Sperry and I am a student with the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare. Thank you for the opportunity to share my concern about the future of community mental health centers with you.

I am not here today as an expert of mental health, but as a concerned citizen and social work student. I chose to study social work because of my desire and passion to help those in need. In order to provide help there has to be resources available for me to do this. If the services are not available or appropriate to the client’s specific need then the risk for greater harm to the client will increase. **Without community services being available, Kansans in need of mental health services will suffer, their lives will be dramatically affected, and their chances for success in life will be severely limited.**

I was nervous about speaking today and brought this up in one of my classes. I was amazed to learn how many of my fellow students have a personal understanding of mental health issues. It is likely that most everyone in this room has a story of someone they know who has been affected by mental health issues as well. We must be aware that mental health issues affect us all and that although we may have access to services or support systems to help us live our lives fully, there are many in our state that do not. These are the people that I am most worried about and who have the greatest need in our communities. Without the support of community mental health services, tasks such as paying bills or holding down a job can become difficult or impossible to manage for many.

I am graduating in May and I am excited and hopeful about having the opportunity to empower vulnerable citizens by helping them recognize their own strengths and contributions to society. I am asking you today to help make this possible by refraining from making any more cuts to mental health services as well as to restore funding to levels prior to the year-by-year cuts that have been occurring in the state of Kansas. Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center provides mental health services to my community of Lawrence, KS and they served almost 6,000 adults and children combined last year in Douglas County. Even with state funding being reduced considerably since 2007, Bert Nash has continued to provide needed services. If they continue to receive more cuts, then the quality of services and the amount of people they are able to reach go down significantly. I am not comfortable with that. I am making a promise to those in need of support to be there for them so I ask you to help me do this by making the resources available.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my concerns with you all today, this has been a great learning experience for me.

---