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Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee on SB 1

Hello Chair Ogden and members of the committee,

My name is Diana Kern and today I am representing myself as a person who lives with a mental illness and NAMI Texas (National Alliance on Mental Illness). I am also speaking on behalf of the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities as a Governor's appointee member until 2015.

The first time I testified before the Senate Finance Committee in the late 90's, I thanked the chair, Senator Bill Ratliff, for investing in my mental health treatment.

After the hearing, Senator Ratliff caught me in the hallway and thanked me for telling my story and told me to continue to speak up. He said that our Legislators need to hear from those of us who have benefitted from the services that our state funds.

I took Senator Ratliff's advice and I am here to testify once again.

If it weren't for our public mental health agency, I would not be where I am today as a functioning member of my community. Because of the necessary treatment that I have received, I am now a homeowner and tax-payer.

My brain disorder is indeed an illness like any other chronic illness. It is through no fault of my own, that I have acquired this lifelong disorder.

Without ongoing treatment, I am unable to live independently and I certainly would not be able to hold down a job.

I consider myself a return on the state's investment.

Throughout the years I have personally experienced the gaps in the system and the lack of continuity of mental health care.

One example of this is when I was unable to get a doctor's appointment for over a month. My symptoms of psychosis were affecting my ability to take care of myself and I ended up being hospitalized.

If I had been able to see a doctor when I needed, I would have not only saved the state money, but my road toward recovery would have been more stable and prevented future crisis from occurring.

When a person with a psychotic disorder is not being treated on a regular basis, their illness becomes progressively worse. I should know. For a period of time, my illness did progress and my needs were greater and the costs were higher.

Two sessions ago, we were very grateful that DSHS received \$82 million for crisis services. This money was well spent and proved to be a good use of government resources.

However, if community mental health centers were sufficiently funded in the first place, our need for crisis services would have been much less.

With an even greater budget shortfall, I am concerned that the gains we have made in our efficient use of the crisis money will all be for naught.

You will undoubtedly see more homeless people in our communities, our jails will continue to be flooded with persons unable to access mental health care, the suicide rate will increase and not only will persons with a serious mental illness suffer, many family members will suffer as well.

As you make these difficult budget decisions, I hope you will remember me and the others in Texas who have benefitted from mental health services. I think we are worth it.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Kern". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.