

Good afternoon. My name is Catherine Arbogast, and I am the Assistant Administrator for Drug and Alcohol and represent the Single County Authority for Centre County on Drug and Alcohol Services. Thank you for choosing Centre County to be part of the information gathering process of the Behavioral Health Commission and thank you to Natalie and the Board of Commissioners for including the SCA in the partners who are gathered today to provide testimony on the use of available funding for mental health services in the state of Pennsylvania.

The National Institutes of Health estimates that 7.7 million Americans have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. One does not necessarily cause the other, and it is not always clear which occurs first. What is clear is that to achieve a level of success, both must be addressed in treatment. The availability of sufficient mental health services and resources is of critical importance to the providers and individuals receiving services in the SUD recovery community. When a person who has a substance use disorder calls and is requesting a referral for mental health services and learns that there is a 2-3 month wait for services, this can be devastating news. Their need is urgent.

Trauma is also a significant risk factor for those who have a substance use disorder. Many of these individuals have used substances for years, as a mechanism for managing the experiences they have faced. They need experienced professionals who can not only assist them with the substance use, but the underlying triggers that have brought them to these uncontrolled behaviors.

Throughout this afternoon's dialog, you will hear from many individuals who will present on a variety of programs areas – all of which are excellent uses of this funding. The key point I would like to recommend to this committee, is the importance of getting these funds out at the county level, where administrators and providers can use the dollars to meet the needs of their communities. Every rural community is very different. They have existing systems and programs, and their needs and gaps will vary. To have the greatest impact, each county needs to define their need, and then have the flexibility in the use of the funds to address those needs in a way that makes the most sense. Every county may approach this differently but will do so in a way that meets their unique situations.

Rural communities are similar in a lot of ways. When we work together, we share ideas and learn from each other. But when those ideas come back to home, they often evolve into something that will work in our communities. Funding at the local level. Flexibility. We make things happen here. Thank you.

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