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Good morning. For the record, my name is Carlos Brandenburg, and I am the Administrator of the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services. ~~Many~~ fellow Nevadans woke up this morning to face another day of coping with serious mental illness. Individuals who suffer from serious mental illness have psychotic symptoms - hallucinations, auditory and/or visual, and delusional thinking such as paranoia.

Let's ask ourselves, "Who are these fellow Nevadans who struggle with serious mental illness?" They are our mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, neighbors and friends. Mental illness is shockingly common, affecting almost every American family, directly or indirectly. Mental illness can strike someone of any background. It can strike at any stage of life, from childhood to old age. No community is unaffected, no school or work place untouched. Nevadans with serious mental illness are one of our state's most vulnerable groups. We see them in our streets, under our bridges, down by the river, and in our jails. The bottom line is that mental illness is very common and very disabling, and is not to be dismissed as a character flaw or weakness.

In the speech launching the President's new Freedom Commission on Mental Health, President Bush said, "Americans must understand and send this message: mental disability is not a scandal, it is an illness, and like physical illness, it is treatable, especially when the treatment comes early."

While many SMI Nevadans are given good treatment and manage to recover, the reality is that about one out of every two Nevadans who seek mental health treatment does not receive it. The mental health agencies you will hear from today are dedicated to the single most important goal of the people they serve, the hope of recovery. However, you will hear of a system where individuals have to wait up to 60 to 90 days to be seen in the medication clinic, where psychiatrists are carrying a caseload of 800 clients, where for the past six months an average of 19 seriously mentally ill per day have waited an average of 48 hours each in the Las Vegas Valley's emergency rooms before being transferred to Southern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services. But most disturbing is that 35% of these high-risk individuals identified as being an imminent danger to self or others leave with no evaluation, treatment or follow up. Compounding all this, as most of you know, the state's budget, which forced the Governor to request a 3% cut, has resulted in the Mental Health and Developmental Agencies cutting a total of 2.7 million dollars.

I am sure that after our testimony you will hear from our consumers, advocates, family members, law enforcement representatives and judges about the many challenges facing the Division and Nevadans with SMI.