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Good Morning Senators and Assembly Persons.

My Name is Joe Tyler and I am speaking to you today in support of the mental health and developmental services budget. I am President of National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Northern Nevada. I am also a peer services counselor at NNAMHS but my views today do not represent my state position. I am speaking on behalf of NAMI.

These are truly uncertain times. Everyday we are on the brink of war. A nationwide recession started with the last administration has slowed our tourism economy with casinos on every border. As a result almost all casinos last year posted losses. And yet the state keeps growing at a record rate about 4,500 people per month according to some estimates. How can we do more with less?

I was recently called by a 74 year old Mother living with her daughter in Mesquite Nevada saying my 41-year-old daughter has had multiple episodes causing her to seek treatment at SNAMHS on numerous occasions but because of overcrowding she was never treated on the inpatient unit. Last week her aging Mother reached her frustration level; she packed her up and came all the way to Reno to seek treatment. She was never admitted to the unit possibly because late last year a full time Psychiatrist was cut from staff in order to save the psychiatric residency program, a program that has not been included in the state 2003-2005 budget.

In my NAMI organization there has been an enormous growth of frustrated families. One Mother whose son took off his cloths and ran naked through a graveyard was later caught walking down the freeway. He managed to land two short stays on the acute unit at NNAMHS but never long enough to remain safe. He told me that he agreed to engage in talk therapy but the court didn't feel he represented a danger to himself or others and so he was released. He was released after just a 4 day stay. Today he is being held in custody for assaulting a police officer after he was caught walking on the freeway again this time in Auburn Ca. At least he'll possibly be put in jail or prison where sometimes treatment better. Sad isn't it? You have to go to jail to get treatment. Which incidentally, costs taxpayers more and destroys quality of life as well as any possible productivity he would have had.

To assist these and other families like these, I would like to re-request your continued support for our NAMI family-to-family program lagging behind the rest of the State especially in northern Nevada. It's a proven nationally acclaimed 12 week training classes for the mothers and fathers sisters and brother sons and daughters and even husband's and wife's who with knowledge as well as support can and will be better able to provide for their loved-one's care.

The same illness that my father, Brent Tyler has/will attest, tore our family apart. If all families had support and knowledge that a program like the NAMI family-to-family program provides they might not have had to suffer so tragically!!! I am therefore again requesting State support to train volunteer teachers who will in turn pass on their knowledge and support toward understand these devastating illnesses. Biennium before

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last we were granted 75,000.00 dollars. There are many teachers who have taught many families primarily in southern Nevada but the work goes on and your support is needed.

In conclusion, I produce a TV show that airs in the Reno, Sparks and here in Carson City that helps put a face on Mental Illness it's called "Erasing the Stigma." On it we say that only 50% of those who are diagnosed with a major mental illness receive the treatment they need. When they do not get treatment they wind up homeless or in jail. I was one of the of the lucky ones. Don't doubt the power of recovery by an individual who truly wants to get better and can find a medication that will alleviate the torturous symptoms of an illness that steals one's logic and reasoning. Donna is one. Support choices for meds. All meds don't work the same for all survivors with mental illness. When I gave my doctor a choice among several treatment options he succeeded in making me more productive. In fact I'm as productive as I've ever been and maybe even smarter now since I'm over 50.

We consumers die at a rate of 10 to 15 percent due to our illnesses by suicide. I haven't been suicidal in over 15 years thanks to my family support, the mental health system, and my medications. But I'm here to say it hasn't always been a bed of roses but speaking from experience insanity isn't all it's cracked up to be!!!! Thank you for allowing me to speak before you and I'd be glad to take any questions.