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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 for which I do volunteer work representing upwards of 6 hours per week every week over and above my regular 40-hours/ state duties. I wish no remuneration for this work. Helping families in distress is pay enough.

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 yet 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 clothing 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. 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 Sacramento, 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 will be better able to provide for their loved-one's care.

The same illness that my father, Brent Tyler testified tore our family apart. You heard his compelling testimony on President's Day. He, like Vic Davis talked about the "thrill" of living in the same house with someone who is floridly psychotic, the demonic presence, the howling at the moon, the being hold up in his room. My father said, "Stay in reality, Joe." My mother said, "Are you aware that you've been staring at the wall for hours?" If all families had support and knowledge that a program like the NAMI family-to-family program provides they wouldn't suffer in ignorance so tragically as mine did! Our Families are our best allies.

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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 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. We would appreciate any support but are requesting \$25,000.00 dollars.

In conclusion, 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. 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.

The fact today that I'm on Risperdal has made all the difference between only being able to work part-time and low level job at near minimum wage 11 years ago to being able to produce a weekly TV show, administer our NAMI Northern Nevada an organization of over 90 families and individuals strong, as well as tackle a full time in a challenging dynamic Peer Specialist position with 17 client contact hours per week conducting psycho-educational groups with the State. The right medication is not always found on the first try, but if given enough choices quality of life will improve and productivity. It is enhanced by lessening side effects and improving efficacy. Again support choices for our psychiatrist. I haven't been hospitalized since Risperdal came out in 1994, at a cost savings of literally tens of thousands of dollars over my seven previous stays on other medications.

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. Thank you.

Joe Tyler