

Theresa Utton

Subject: FW: cuts to mental health

From: "Chuck Myers (NFI VT)"

Date: August 12, 2014 at 1:00:23 PM EDT

Subject: RE: cuts to mental health

Dear Representative Heath;

I am Executive Director of a Northeastern Family Institute, a small state-wide non-profit mental health agency (Designated Specialized Service Agency). I am writing to inform you of the tremendous difficulty we are having in hiring and retaining competent staff in our mental health and specialized education programs. The administration's proposed budget cuts would negatively affect our ability to compete with much better funded employers in our communities. Hospitals, physicians' offices, FQHC's, schools and the state all hire staff at significantly higher rates than we can in base salary, and they all offer better benefits, often including retirement.

Mental health funding to DA's has lagged behind inflation by 14% over the last 8 years. State employees are receiving a 2.5% cola plus a 1.8% step increase. They are obviously very deserving. However, NFI has lost several staff to the state and other employers in the last 2 months. Physician's groups and hospitals are hiring mental health staff at more than \$10,000 greater salaries. We are trying to do the work of the state, but this makes it nearly impossible to continue to do so effectively. Maintaining the 1.6% Medicaid funded increase (the federal government pays the majority of the increase) for salaries would keep mental health providers from losing even more ground.

We serve only youth. Especially in view of the tragedies experienced by youths in our communities, it would seem contra-indicated to cut already small salaries for staff serving youth at this time. I am happy to answer any questions.

Thank you for your service to our state,

Sincerely,
Chuck Myers, Ph.D.
Executive Director
NFI Vermont, Inc.