



February 21, 2017

Esteemed Joint Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee members,

I am writing in support of the OYA requested budget which includes a critical rate increase for Behavioral Rehabilitation Service programs. This rate increase is critical to ongoing, quality programming for the at-risk youth who need BRS services to succeed. The Governor's Recommended Budget has included a rate increase for OYA providers indicating the genuine need for this increase.

I have been with Homestead for 20 years and now serve as the Executive Director. In that time, we have worked closely with OYA to improve the effectiveness of services for the most at-risk and needy youngsters in our state. Often, we have youth placed here that have extensive trauma histories, academic failure, family instability, learning challenges and mental health issues. They have become deeply involved with various systems in their young lives. Our mission is to provide targeted, effective services that launch them toward becoming productive, healthy members of our state's communities. We are often able to see this come to fruition. Just last week, a young man stopped in to introduce me to his wife and new baby. He'd been a client here when he was 17 and was able to finish high school, address his mental health issues and trauma history and complete substance abuse treatment with BRS services. He shared details of his full time employment, college courses and successful parenting.

In order to provide effective services, we must be able to recruit and maintain a highly qualified and committed staff to meet the needs of youth in our BRS programs. A 16-month process of 3 state agencies, youth, advocates, CCO's and providers identified a 30% rate gap between current rates and what it costs to serve these youth. The increase in rates will allow us to maintain a stable, predictable group of caring adults who are around for the duration of a youth's treatment here. Being able to pay our staff a wage with which they can support their own families and be contributing members of their own communities is important.

Programs like Homestead cannot continue to operate in the black with current rates. Over the last 48 months, 23 Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) contracts have been given back to OYA and DHS because of low rates, which are exacerbated by extremely challenging regulatory oversight and risk management for highly traumatized children and their behaviors.

Thank you for your time and support,

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