

Testimony

Interim Human Service Committee

Representative Kathy Hogan, Chairman

May 10, 2016

Chairperson Hogan, members of the Interim Human Service Committee, I am Jordan May, with Fraser, Ltd., Fargo. Today I am here to impart the difficulties that transition age youth face in regards to homelessness and their mental health. In my years working with transitional youth I have seen firsthand the correlation between mental health and homelessness. Each year, thousands of youth between the ages 18-21 leave their family **(or childhood)** home, foster care systems, and other placements to strive for self-sufficiency. Most of these young adults were separated from their parents and siblings, and experienced continued instability as they moved frequently between placements. Unsurprisingly, the majority struggle to secure and maintain housing, transportation, employment, and health care. Many of the youth we serve share a history of abuse, neglect, or abandonment that led to their homeless status after exiting the home, foster care, or other placements. These youth exhibit higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems and the disparity persists into early adulthood. It is not uncommon for mental health treatment received while in placement to be discontinued after emancipation, leaving the youth on their own yet again. Most people who experience mental illnesses and substance use disorders will improve if they receive appropriate services at the right time. Both conditions take a tremendous toll on our communities. Mental illness and substance abuse conditions often co-occur. In other words, individuals with substance abuse conditions often have a mental health condition at the same time, and persons with mental health problems often abuse substances or experience addiction at the same time.

**Increasing Access to Programs and Services.** Increasing access to mental health and other essential services can improve educational and other outcomes for transitional age youth. Elements of success for this strategy include implementing better ways to identify and connect with transitional age youth, increasing their awareness of local resources, and facilitating their connection to services and supports.

Jordan May

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