November 22, 2010

Dear Chairman Dean Cameron and Committee Members,

First I would like to thank The Health and Welfare Task Force for this opportunity. As many of you might already know my name is Ryan Mitchell and I was recently shot in Pocatello, Idaho by a mentally disabled individual, who was no longer on his medication because of state budget cuts which negatively impacted the Assertive Community Treatment program (ACT).

As a point of introduction, I am a graduate of Montana State University with a degree in Industrial Engineering. After graduation I moved back to Idaho to start employment at the Idaho National Laboratories for Bechtel Marine Propulsion Corp.

On behalf of my family, and myself I would like to take this opportunity to express concern about the status of mental health funding and explain how it has changed and affected my life greatly. On the night of September 27, 2010 I was victim of an act of violence by an individual who had been cut from an Idaho Health & Welfare medication program on July 1 of this year. As I left a local Pocatello coffee shop, Mocha Madness, computer bag slung over my right shoulder, the individual came up behind me, sight unseen, and chose to shoot me in the back for some irrational and unexplained reason. The doctors who first saw me at the Portneuf Medical Center in Pocatello initially gave me a 2% chance of living. I hope the message I come with you today may be heard clearly and pointedly.

No, I did not know this individual and he did not know me. There is absolutely no reason it was me. Yes, this could happen again. And yes, this event was and is preventable.

I am a very lucky individual; for having qualified first responders to the medical team at the Portneuf medical center, all of whom, helped save my life, despite the long odds. I am here today to tell the legislative body, and the governor of Idaho, to do all they have within their power to make sure another senseless and tragic event, such as mine, will not happen again.

This event occurred shortly after an individual with a known mental health disorder was cut from an already fragile government funded program.

Thankfully I am here with you today and able to ask the following questions:

> How are we, as a state going to make sure this incident will not happen again?
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> Why wasn't the family of the perpetrator notified of the medication cuts?
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> Why did the legislature cut this program when it's my understanding they were warned that an incident like this may happen?
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> Isn't it the responsibility of our government to help those who are not able to take care of themselves and more importantly to ensure public safety?

The taxpayers of Idaho saved nothing by cutting the funding of the ACT program (Assertive Community Treatment), and actually will have to pay more in the long run. Short term, the costs involved include the police investigation, the prosecution, a public defender and the eventual incarceration, and long term, these costs most likely will exceed the cost of the perpetrators' medications received under the State and Federally matched ACT program. Furthermore, as a matter of public safety, if the perpetrator's medications had to be cut, didn't the state have an obligation to institutionalize him so that he could not harm others?

I did not ask to be an advocate for mental health reform in Idaho, nor did I ever think I would have the scar to show what can happen when a mentally disabled person no longer is being treated or has access to medication. All I ask is for my message to be passed on to make others aware that budget cuts have gone too far. This issue is a public safety matter and should be fixed with a bipartisan effort. Please fix our current Idaho Mental Health and Welfare funding issue. Lastly, on behalf of my family and me, we do not want to see another individual go through what we are currently enduring, for the similar reasons.

Yours truly,

Ryan M. Mitchell