

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members, of the committee. My name is Victor Obisakin. I am the Peer Program Director and Legislative Liaison for Wellness in the Woods.

I've had the privilege of meeting some of you. What I've gathered from all of you is you care. You care about the mental health situation in Minnesota. We here all share the same passion.

Our goal is very simple. We have it on our website. "We are dedicated to improving access to mental health care and substance use recover for all residents of Minnesota with a focus on reaching underserved communities."

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, there is a need for mental health services, especially in Greater Minnesota. Greater Minnesota is often overlooked. Yes, it is true things are improving but more could be done. This is where we step in. This is where we need help. With more funding for marketing, we can serve those in underserved communities.

I used to live in one of those communities. When a participant tells me, "Thank goodness for wellness in the woods, I don't know where I'd be if not for you all." It breaks my heart because years back, I was one of those people that needed help. Although I found help, my need came late at night when I really needed someone. At 10 pm, everything is closed. I called a number who were supposed to help me, turns out, they increased my anxiety even more. To cut it short, she made me feel even worse. Much worse!

I jumped into my car and headed west for 45 minutes. That was where I was able to get my help.

I want to admit that I was privileged. I was able to drive. To get the help I need.

Not many people can do that. I was very lucky.

With a click or call, we can support you right where you are. We will support you for free. That is what we are all about.

Mental Health Disorder does not discriminate. It does not care if you are Republican, Democrat, Black, White, Native American, Asian, or Hispanic. It does not care about your sexual orientation.

We want to be able to support everyone in Minnesota. It does not matter who you are, where you are from or your diagnosis. That's it. It is that simple.

We are a very special group of people. We have all been scared by some sort of mental health disorder. Instead of using those scars negatively, we are choosing to use those experiences positively to support others because we have all been there and that is what makes us great Certified Peer Specialists. You want experience, we got the experience.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I'll end by quoting one of our members, "Victor I want you and your boss to know this. You are saving lives. You saved my life."

Please help us support ALL Minnesota even more.

Thank you.