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Good Afternoon! I am Karen Gates, Co-founder of The Ark Association, a nonprofit organization located in Detroit to assist those with physical, mental, financial, and addictive challenges in finding wellness, wholeness, and inclusion within our community. I am also an individual seeking personal mental health wellness as I am diagnosed ADHD, Bi-polar, and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). In addition, I am in recovery from substance abuse with 25 years of continued abstinence.

The issue I would like to address is being looked at by DCH Director Jim Haveman in Workgroup #2: Housing, Independent Living Support and Long Term Care. The lack of resources and revenue for this particular area impacts so many facets of our community: personal lives, private corporations, nonprofit and service organizations, fiduciary resources, judicial and health costs, and governmental budgets. The current system fails those who are struggling with mental illness and causes things like chronic homelessness using up 80% of the funds for less than 10% of the displaced, un-housed individuals.

One of the reasons for the success of my recovery comes from the close knit community that supports, guides, encourages, and walks with me through my steps in life so that I don't return to my former state. A micro-community environment with peer support advocates and life coaches incorporated into the living environment would foster an atmosphere of respect, dignity, support, accountability, and the extra set of eyes necessary for sustainability of inclusion. This will bring about an achievement of the highest level of independence possible. Jim Casha and I have created such a community with a supportable life plan. We have shared the vision of the Van Gogh's Bedroom micro-community with Empowerment For The Future Life Plan living with many throughout the past couple of years. There has been a lot of positive feedback and a desire for collaborative work. Where we run into the most red tape is from governmental agencies when attempting to move the vision forward. Thus, I am glad Governor Snyder created the Mental Health and wellness Commission upon issuing Executive Order 2013-6. Let's see to it that action is not in vain. We are destined to continue the repetitive cycle that destroys human dignity and independence without change in mental health wellness.

I celebrate the opening of the community discussions, raising awareness, breaking down stereotypes, and seeing a new dawn of hope rising above the adversity found within mental health challenges. Each workgroup is strategic and necessary to implement these crucial changes to bring about wholeness and wellness in our neighborhoods, city, county, state and national systems! Thank you for this opportunity to speak. Blessings upon the Mental Health and Wellness Commission.