

Public Hearing  
Committee on Human Services  
Tuesday February 26, 2008

**SB 413 : AN ACT ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY PROVIDER RESCUE FUND  
ACCOUNT AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES COMMISSION.**

**Barry Kasdan, President and CEO**

I am here in support of SB 413 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY PROVIDER RESCUE FUND ACCOUNT AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES COMMISSION.

Bridges...A Community support system Inc. is a full service State funded Behavioral Health agency located in Milford. We provide services at almost half the cost of a state facility and certainly far less than institutional living. But over the last twenty-plus years, the state has habitually underfunded this important part of our healthcare system.

Even as the consumer price index increases, the state has chosen to ignore our plight. The Governor and Legislature have failed to address every major increase in the cost of doing business. Even with programs that the State fully funds, they have never addressed the issues of escalating health insurance and fuel costs.

Every year we ask for more help. Every year we get less funding than we need to do the job. Over the last two years, increases averaged 2.25 %. Next year, the budgeted increase is zero. That would drag the average down to 1.2 % over three years. We would like to think that this is just a bad dream. But it keeps coming back..... every night!

Every year, we find ourselves begging the Administration and Legislators for help and in recent years our pleas are most often met with silence and inaction.

That the current state budget includes no increase to cover the cost of services is prime example of the crisis we are in. It is an assault on the residents and leaders of every community that has stepped to the plate over these many years to support and nurture these community services.

At my agency and many others, we must turn away, or put waiting lists each and every day people in need of help. At Bridges the numbers have climbed to 20-30 per week. Where do these folks go?

When we talk about emergency rooms and hospital grid-lock does anyone in state government make the connection? Must we wait for tragedies to see the connections?

At a recent Appropriations Committee Hearing, a Dept Commissioner observed that many of the dollars being spent at hospital level care are not well spent. That was not meant to say that we don't need emergency rooms and hospital beds. It focused on the reality that we need more community and stronger community services to begin reducing these admissions and unreasonable costs to the citizens of Connecticut.

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Providing Behavioral Health Services to Milford, Orange and West Haven.

State Funding Support from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Child and Families, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Mental Retardation, Court Support Services Division.

Local Funding from the City of Milford, Town of Orange and Milford United Way. Licensed by the Department of Public Health and Department of Children and Families, State of Connecticut. Member of Communicare, Inc.



How do we do that with a ZERO increase on the very grants that are the front-line of defense in this struggle?

So, as the legislature is crafting its own budget proposal for the next fiscal year, we strongly support SB 413.

As you know SB 413 has three critical components "To establish a community provider rescue fund, community-based services commission and capital improvement fund to stabilize the funding of necessary services for children and adults with disabilities, persons with substance use disorders and persons with mental illness."

The combined cost of an emergency room and hospital bed for one year is over \$350,000 annually. That equals 5% on our agency's state grants. At Bridges, we could see hundreds more people in need of our services with those dollars. We would also reduce emergency room and hospital bed access making a local investment of those resources highly effective. Why is that so hard to see? Some analysis projects that for every \$1 spent in community treatment the state can save \$7 in future cost.

So why do we ignore the fiscal imperative of such data?

The prospect of a Commission to begin looking at such data to ultimately drive better budget planning, is actually exciting. Imagine actually saving taxpayers dollars by through long range fiscal planning.

Needless to say SB 413 is our best hope to remedy a horrendous chronic funding problem that as we meet here today is putting thousands of people at risk. .

A system that cares for those most at risk is now itself at risk, and in need of being rescued.

I feel that the SB 413 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY PROVIDER RESCUE FUND ACCOUNT AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES COMMISSION is a reasonable and responsible response to repair decades of neglect to our community provider system.

It's been said that a time of a crisis is also a time of opportunity.

I believe that time is before us.

Thank You