



Catalyst for Community Change

March 6, 2009

Good Afternoon Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Re: SB 847, AA IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PUBLIC HEALTH, Section 58(d)

My name is Janice M. Laster. I am the RAC Director at RYASAP, serving the Greater Bridgeport region. The Regional Action Councils are the hub for prevention in the State as well as the coordinating point for addiction prevention in the State. RACs survey young people regarding their ATOD&G (Alcohol Tobacco Other Drugs and Gambling) use and abuse and the mitigating factors. RAC's also convene top level and grassroots leaders in their communities to identify needs and develop resources to meet these needs.

Studies have proven that as the economy declines, substance abuse increases. We need to continue to be on the front lines in our communities. Insufficient funding will jeopardize the prevention infrastructure that CT has worked 20 years to build. In addition the RAC structure is held up as a model by other states and the federal government. I remind you of the return on investment we provide.

The Regional Action Councils utilize the State of Connecticut funds to leverage and match additional federal and local funding. In the past four years, we have collectively enhanced prevention services in the state by obtaining \$6.5 million in federal and over \$8 million in local dollars. These dollars would not be available to us if we did not have the state dollars to leverage or match them.

These dollars directly impact the communities you serve because we have been able to invest in local prevention activities. I ask you to remember your return on investment is for every state dollar you allocate to RACs we bring in over \$4 in other funds including federal and local. We need the state dollars to match these federal dollars as federal substance abuse block grant dollars can't be used to match additional federal dollars. Please do not break a system that is efficient, effective, and beneficial to both our communities and the state.

We recognize that this budget proposal is impacting many services and agencies in our state. The Governor's proposed budget has eliminated the RAC line item and other state funds in the DMHAS budget of approximately \$600,000 and transfers to DMHAS \$600,000 from the Pre-trial Alcohol Substance Abuse Account for Regional Action Councils.

However, previously in the past several years, \$500,000 has also been transferred from the Pre-trial Account to the RACs. This transfer is not included in the Governor's budget. However, Section 58(d) of SB 847 does transfer \$500,000 to DMHAS from the Pre-trial Account for "prevention programs, including but not limited to, tobacco cessation programs and substance abuse disorder education programs." These are the types of prevention programs that the Regional Action Councils implement.

We ask that you specifically state that these funds will be used for RACs so that the local prevention infrastructure will be flat funded for the next two years and not be reduced by almost 50%. This will not require any addition to the bottom line of the Governor's proposed budget.

Please remember that RACs are a good investment of State dollars.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Janice M. Laster, CPP-R  
RAC Director

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