

Bethany Davidson
Public Hearing Testimony
UCONN School of Social Work

Honorable Senators and Representatives, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Bethany Davidson and I am a student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I am here today to testify in support of Bill # 1163, **“An Act Concerning Expenditures of State Agencies Providing Public Health, Mental Health, and Developmental Services”**.

It is essential that state funded programs be evaluated on an on-going basis. This helps to identify the areas where programs and service provision can be expanded and improved. Public health, mental health and developmental service programs are central components of the social services provided by the state.

However, I caution against prioritizing the continued funding of such programs. For example, the variety of programs and initiatives being implemented by The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) include prevention services which aim to “promote the overall health and wellness of individuals and communities by preventing or delaying substance use”.

The Department of Public Health is currently implementing a training program for the integration of HIV care and prevention whose goal is to build capacity among all HIV care and prevention providers in the state.

Additionally, programs through the Department of Developmental Services like Community Living Services seek to enable individuals to make their own choices about how and where they live in order that they begin to integrate into community life.

Programs and services such as these are important and need to be funded.

As an intern with AIDS Project New Haven, Connecticut’s oldest AIDS service organization, I have seen firsthand the vital services the Department of Public Health provides for people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. In Connecticut alone, there are an estimated 11,000 people living with HIV and AIDS.

Support services like medical case management, health care, housing, transportation, addiction services, mental health services and medication are essential for improving the quality of life and support experienced by people living with HIV and their families.

There is also research that suggests more than 20% of people who test positive for HIV also receive an AIDS diagnosis. This means there is much work to be done in the areas of education, prevention, and testing.

Lastly, I would like to commend the hard work of this committee. And especially highlight the recommendation made for a restoration of \$1.7 million for HIV and AIDS services to the proposed cuts of almost \$3 million made by the Governor to the AIDS service line.

Services like the ones provided by the Department of Public Health promote the overall health of individual people in Connecticut and encourage healthy communities. These are the kinds of programs we should ensure are functioning effectively and are *funded* so they are enabled to positively impact individual people and improve the quality of life in our communities.