

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan
December 9, 2009
Heather Gates, Community Health Resources

Good afternoon/evening. My name is Heather Gates. I am the President/CEO of Community Health Resources. We provide behavioral health and social services in central and eastern Connecticut to all ages. We have contracts with all of the states' human service agencies including: Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Department of Children and Families, Department of Social Services, DPH etc. We also contract with the judicial department through the court support services division. We serve the most severely mentally ill and emotionally challenged adults, adolescents and children and their families. Our services include outpatient therapy and medication management, case management, residential, in-home interventions, mobile crisis response, partial hospital, and therapeutic foster care. We also provide supported housing, family violence education, homeless prevention, and a host of other basic supports. We serve over 8000 adults, children and families a year. This represents a 17% increase from the previous year while at the same time much of our funding remained flat.

The recent rescissions implemented by the governor's office and the mitigation plan proposed to the legislature made across the board cuts to the infrastructure of the human service system in Connecticut. In addition, the cuts to the supports for individuals and families attack the most vulnerable and impoverished citizens of Connecticut. In every regard the cuts affect every aspect of the lives of the people we serve. Housing supports, mental health treatment, case management, services to new mothers, prevention programs, access to in-home treatment etc., etc., etc. Over and over again cuts have been made that will contribute to an increase in the use of emergency rooms, jails, homeless shelters, and nursing homes. This budget is an example of short terms savings that will create higher long term expenditures. It is bad human service and fiscal policy.

In order to manage cuts passed on to us through the rescissions we have eliminated positions that would have provided services to over 200 adults with serious mental illness. Freezing admissions to the SAGA program increases the use of hospitals and emergency rooms. Individuals leaving jail will not have access to services to help them stay out of jail. Cuts to Medicaid rates leave federal revenue on the table while at the same time destabilizing an overburdened provider system.

We recognize that the state is in a very difficult financial situation, but it does not make sense to cut the most effective and efficient part of the human service system – community based services. Weakening this system at a time when demand is higher than ever makes no sense. Please restore the cuts in the mitigation plan to the human service accounts.