

**Testimony
Appropriations Committee
Mark Kistner
20 February 2009**

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak before you tonight.

My name is Mark Kistner, my address is 68 Thermos Ave., Norwich, CT. I am a person who was diagnosed with HIV in 1987.

I was adopted in New Jersey at 6 months old by a loving family that is unable to be here tonight. They provide me with a strong support system, but when my family can't be there Alliance for Living is. That is the reason I stand here today. It is my sincerest hope you will continue to support Alliance whose main goal is to provide services to those infected and affected with the virus.

I ask you to consider what the elimination of 40% of the AIDS Service budget will mean to me, and others like me, that receive services from Alliance. Services like 44 apartments, lunches and dinners and a food pantry which provided over 1,000 meals just in January, case management for its 260 members, crisis management for someone like Olivia who is infected and her two sons as they cope with the recent loss of her husband, support for medical and mental health visits, medication and an AIDS prevention program presented to teens and adults. I am gripped by the fear of what will happen to me and countless others that Alliance serves if this 40% cut is enacted.

In 1986 grassroots organizations in New London County responded to this unknown virus – they gave encouragement, they gave love, they helped people die with dignity - when government organizations were still scrambling to figure out their next steps.

At the same time the virus hit us in 1986, survivors and heroes of the Vietnam War and subsequent wars were fighting the governments' denial of the medical, mental and socio economical issues that were caused by the wars. I relate the outbreak of HIV/AIDS to moments in time that define our history and our abilities to respond to devastating and horrific consequences of decisions made to go to war or to make love. These decisions were made without the ability to foresee the severity of the consequences.

We did not know that sending our troops into battle was going to bring them back with severe disabilities, and we did not know that engaging in basic human sexual behavior was going to have the ramifications devastating disease that was fatal. I believe that my responsibility is to continue to be a productive member of this planet. I believe that it takes more than me to fulfill that obligation. It takes the love and support of my family, friends, church, and an incredible organization, Alliance for Living. Without these, what I have learned, is systematically there is a breakdown that has been proven to precipitously diminish the quality of life for those we are mutually responsible for.

I ask you to please allow me to continue working at my job and living in my apartment, of having a life today. I work hard at repairing the damages I did to myself, at a very young age, and how they affected others. I am doing my part, please don't deny Alliance its ability to do its part.