



**Testimony submitted December 9, 2009 for
Appropriations Committee Hearing on the
Governor’s Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan**

Good evening, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Adrian Elliott, I am a Hartford resident, and I truly appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today. The person you see in front of you is raising a wonderful teen-aged son, finishing a Bachelor Degree at CCSU, and hoping to move into a full time career in graphic arts in the near future. I am in recovery, and volunteering every week with a group that’s helping other women who are struggling. And I’m keeping up with exercise/physical therapy to overcome the injuries from a nearly-fatal car accident two years ago.

But if you had met me a few years back, that is most definitely not what you would have seen! I was homeless, a drug abuser, and my son was in foster care. You’d never have guessed that I had been a basketball player with a high-GPA at a great college. Basically, I was a mess.

What turned things around for me are precisely the things that you are being asked to cut from the state budget: Services to homeless shelters. State-subsidized substance abuse and mental health services. And the Human Services Infrastructure money that lets Community Action Agencies offer intense, caring case management to people like me.

I was staying in a homeless shelter when I heard about the Community Renewal Team, and the services that they provide. OK, I admit I was pretty skeptical at first. I had worked with a few other programs that concentrate on just one service – like addiction or housing. But this group was looking at me as a whole, complicated person. The case manager was going to help me deal with all of my issues at once. That sounded too good to be true.

What I did not understand at that point is that the Human Services Infrastructure funding – what most people call HSI – is designed so that agencies can do exactly that. As you know, HSI funds aren’t tied to a specific program or service, they’re meant to allow wrap-around case

management so that clients can get day-to-day support, find the services that they need and move forward with their lives.

For me, a key element was accountability. The CRT staff expects a lot out of you. Sometimes it seems like more than you can manage. I know that my case manager believed in me more than I believed in myself. The idea is for me to set goals, and for the staff to break down those goals into steps that look achievable. CRT calls this the "Steps to Success."

Well, there were times when those steps seemed more like climbing over giant boulders. I couldn't see myself completing the task, and I would panic. For example, when I completed CRT's subsidized housing program and it was time to carry the full expense of my apartment. I was absolutely terrified, even though I had a full time job. But I had three CRT staff telling me, 'Adrian, you can do it. We know that you can take it from here!' And you know what? They were right! Thanks to the budget coaching, and the good spending habits that I had developed, I have been able to manage that apartment very well.

Based on my experience with CRT, it seems like Community Action Agencies will also meet you wherever you are along the road. After that car accident, I was in the hospital in Maryland, and then recovering down there for months. I'm not seeing how I can hold onto my apartment up here. CRT helped me out.

I get back here on crutches, and I'm deeply depressed. I'm a really high-energy person, I've gotten back to a clean-and-sober lifestyle, and now I'm feeling like it was all going to slip away. So the CRT Behavioral Health Services sends a van for me every day, the driver helps me down from my third-floor apartment, and I enter a partial hospitalization program that gets me back on the right track.

With these injuries, there's no chance for me to get back into the printing business, where I had worked before the accident. But I've always wanted to finish college, which I left in order so I could take care of my mother when she was very sick. CRT helped me find a school, work on recovering some of my credits from years back, and even paid the application and matriculation

fees. This is finals week, in my first semester as a fulltime student in many, many years. I push myself hard to get very good grades, so I'll be working on a graphics portfolio project when I leave here – no matter how late this hearing goes!

When I think of what these services have done for me, for my son and for so many other “Adrians,” I am proud to be living in a state that has – in the past – put funding in the right places. I am proud that our state has been helping people get back on their feet, providing great structure and support.

But what about the future? How will the Adrians of the future re-enter the workforce, be productive citizens and raise their children to be successful?

As I understand it, you are considering a 25 to 30% cut to the very programs that got me here today. Cutting one out of every four support dollars. Please vote ‘no’ to these cuts. Please keep the homeless shelters, mental health services and H SI fully funded.

I’m here with you today, but there are so many other people like me who weren’t invited, who couldn’t have gotten here, and who have no voice most of the time in this room. Please help all of us reach our potential in this community.

Thank you.