



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION
Community Solutions, Not Institutions!
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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
December 9, 2009
The Governor's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan
and the Impact of the Governor's Rescissions

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg, Coordinator of the Keep the Promise Coalition, a statewide mental health advocacy Coalition dedicated to seeing a comprehensive, community mental health system created and sustained in CT.

The Coalition is opposed to many devastating rescissions proposed by the Governor. While economic times continue to get worse, the need for critical mental health services and supports has only increased. Although cuts must be made, we must not allow cuts that disproportionately affect people who have the lowest incomes and the most serious illnesses. To them, these cuts can literally be life-altering. Some of the most impactful, cuts include:

- Suspending intakes into the DCF Voluntary Services program
- Reducing Housing supports and services
- Reducing Young Adult services and delaying placements
- Reducing grants for mental health services and jail diversion funds

And additional, devastating proposed cuts such as:

- Removing the protection for people who are stable on psychiatric medications
- Imposing co-payments for people on Medicaid
- Cutting Housing and homelessness funds
- Freezing intakes into SAGA

Calling mental health services for children "Voluntary" is really a misnomer. The reality is that if families cannot access mental health care for their children, they will be forced into protective services or forced to relinquish custody in order to access needed mental health care. The alternative "choice" is to go without.

Every family I spoke to lamented these “choices”. They live the reality every day and many were faced with these same choices before they were able to access voluntary services.

Any cuts to critical needs such as housing, medications or barriers to accessing housing or mental health care including implementing co-payments, freezing health care intakes, or reducing community services are short-sighted and only result in more costly emergency care and hospitalizations, not to mention the often severe disruption to human lives.

I recently worked with a well-informed advocate in regards to her prescription drug plan. She needs to change because her plan is not one of the accepted “benchmark” plans. As we both trudged through the process of trying to find out which of the 12 plans might best cover some of her medications, it quickly became clear what an arduous, complex task it was. As she repeatedly fought back tears while trying to navigate the murky maze of information, she asked “What about other people who aren’t able to tolerate the stress or complexity of changing plans?” I didn’t have a good answer for her as I, too, fear for the health of Coalition members and other CT citizens who have the misfortune of becoming ill, low income, disabled, or an older adult.

Mahatma Ghandi said “A nation’s greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members.” I would suggest that people are not necessarily weak, but rather vulnerable financially, and physically due to variable life circumstances. It is unconscionable that some people in CT would refuse to tax people who make \$250,000 per year or more and at the same time don’t blink an eye when imposing a healthcare “tax” if you will, on people with the lowest incomes in the state. Perhaps it is because some feel it is easier to “blame” people for their circumstances instead of admitting that even with supports and resources, we are all vulnerable to “no fault” illnesses such as mental illness and the concurrent policy-perpetuated poverty imposed by society. It is easier to turn a blind eye rather than fight denial and turn to our fellow human beings in times of need, but doing otherwise reflects poorly on the State of CT and its purported current mission of “sharing the pain”. People who are older adults, disabled, and low-income continue to take on the brunt of the pain. We must not continue to tolerate short-sighted policies which cost everyone more in the near future. Keep the Promise to CT citizens and reverse harmful rescissions and the devastating proposed cuts before you today.

Thank you.