Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan
Barry Simon, Executive Director, Gilead Community Services and Members of the Board of Directors of CCPA

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Committee. My name is Barry Simon and I am the Executive Director of Gilead Community Services and Past president of the CCPA Board. Gilead Community Services is a mental health provider funded by DMHAS and DCF that serves almost 600 individuals throughout Middlesex County.

The community provider system is a cost effective means of providing vital services that are an integral part of the core mission of government. I am here today on behalf of my clients, my incredible staff (part of which are 1199 union staff) and hundreds of thousands of individuals served by the community provider system to ask that you look to strengthening the community provider system as a way of addressing aspects of the growing fiscal crisis. We thank you for recognizing the value and potential of the efficient and effective system of community-based human service providers. We are a viable alternative to More Costly and Restrictive Levels of Care. I am not here to pit one part of the system against another as you are aware there is need for all parts to perform certain components, I am here to tell you that we provide excellent care that saves the State money.

Community providers deliver services to over 500,000 of the state's most needy residents. Local agencies in all of your districts continue to witness under funding, yet everyday families and individuals across our state turn to their local community provider, at increasing rates, for the support they need to lead more productive, healthy and fulfilling lives. In these difficult economic times, demand for our supports and services have grown significantly, yet funding has not kept pace. The individuals we are serving are those who are getting hurt most in this economic downturn. If the state doesn't look to better ways to fund the system, then our clients will be the ones who are harmed in the process by having their services reduced or cut completely. We support any legislation that improves our ability to provide vital supports to those in need. As you know, there was no COLA increase in FY09. The current budget has flat funding in FY10 and FY11. Three years of no increase for any state funded community provider contracts, coupled with decades of inadequate COLAs, simply does not address our ever increasing operating costs and has forced providers to reduce services. The true issue is with a long term solution for funding any services state or private.

Programs have closed in the last few years and will continue to do so – this is not a false alarm. As an agency we have closed a program and made reductions in others due to the short sighted approach to state budgeting which ultimately will lead to dire consequences for the total community service system. Of deep concern is the fact that the Governor's budget proposal continues the rescissions to our services. We recognize and appreciate that the Legislature wants to invest the limited dollars wisely. In order to get the best return on your investment, it is our belief that funds need to be appropriated to address the comprehensive needs of the system and consumers. Given adequate resources that truly fund our costs of services, we have the capacity and willingness to expand services in the private sector; which saves the State money and brings in federal matching funds.

Here are some real life examples of how the State could better spend the limited resources:

When an RFP goes out for $600,000 and is told it can't be done for that but could be done for $700,000; don't do the services yourself for $1,300,000 since there were no positive responses.

When $70,000 in Vocational support services are cut, 15 of the 25 clients supported are still unemployed and 2 have gone into the hospital for a combined total of more than 90 days at a cost of more than $90,000.

We have recently been awarded a program that will serve 5 individuals who have been in the hospital for 5-10 years. At an approximate cost of $365,000 per person per year. We will serve these women for a cost of approximately $125,000 per person.

The Governor's proposed budget is a stunning setback for the hundreds of thousands who rely on community nonprofit community providers for the services they need and deserve. Now, is a critical moment in time, higher costs and the lack of state support will mean program and service reductions and layoffs at the very moment we should be looking for less costly and more productive alternatives. Such alternatives include capacity building in existing community based programs to assure timely access to services; staff to client ratios need to be improved; higher more intensive levels of community care commensurate with client needs must be developed; and long term solutions to housing and service needs of persons with severe disabilities must be created. Non-profit community providers are part of the solution for the future of the service delivery system and preserving the investment made in quality, cost effective, community care.

We are and will continue to be a cost-effective solution to addressing the growing needs of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. The 500,000 Connecticut residents that use community services need you to help fix this systemic problem before it becomes their healthcare crisis. There is history and models of system realignment that have worked, saved the State money, and produced better outcomes. I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions.

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