949 Bridgeport Avenue, Milford, CT 06460 (203) 878-6365

3/4/11
Appropriations Committee
H.B. No. 6380 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2013.
Barry Kasdan, President and CEO

I am testifying on the Governor's proposed DSS and DCF budgets for the biennium ending June 30, 2013, and its impact on our non-profit state funded behavioral health services. Based in Milford, Bridges provides a comprehensive range of mental health and addiction services to over 6,000 children and adults in a 9 town area.

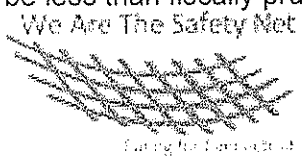
Governor Malloy has inherited a budget crisis, perhaps the most serious we have ever experienced. I believe that he has addressed the budget with a commitment to fairness and a sense of compassion to those most at risk....who each day depend on our safety net of human services.

I have come each year to these hearings to advocate for increased funding to shore up a system of inadequately funded human services that have been left withered and shattered...no longer able to meet the growing demand for services from hundreds of thousands of families, children and adults. Unattended even during times of prosperity we now find ourselves facing an economic storm in a weakened and increasingly unstable position.

To ask for increased funding would seem ill advised during a time when so many are left with so little and we are all being asked to share the burden and pain of this horrendous situation. But our community based system is only as strong as the twine of hundreds of individual human service agencies that are weaved intricately together into this safety net we so desperately depend on. Let it unravel or shred and we will have a human tragedy of even greater dimension than our budget crisis.

The choices before us are not easy ones or even good ones. I have been told that my organization should be relieved that we have yet to take any deep cuts. But after 25 years of underfunding and the prospect of 5 years of no increases our agency is now being positioned...forced to make deep cuts. To assure our financial stability and the integrity of our services, we will during this last quarter of the fiscal year begin that process. As a behavioral health services agency we are left with few choices but to cut back on staff and services. This comes on the heels of slow but steady cuts from multiple sources over the last 3 years of close to $300,000. In this shattered economy costs keep rising, funding and fundraising is down and demand for services keeps increasing. A perfect storm or perhaps a formula for disaster.

The most important message I can convey to you today, is that no matter how bad our fiscal situation you will realize no savings from cutting or even flat funding community based behavioral health services.

A robust and adequately funded community system of mental health and addiction services that keeps adults and children out of institutional care is the most cost effective formula to confront the state budget crisis. Compare $ 451,140 a year at Connecticut Valley Hospital or $769,960 a year at Riverview Hospital against a range of community behavioral health services that runs around 10% of those costs...yes 10% to keep a child or adult in their community, at home, in school or at work.

I fear that any further undermining of these essential community services will only shred the safety net and be less than fiscally prudent in these challenging times.