



*February 15, 2013*

*Testimony to the Health and Hospitals Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee*

*Jim Probolus - Past President of the Board of Directors of Gilead Community Services, Middletown, CT*

### **DMHAS Budget**

Good evening Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, and members of the Committee.

My name is Jim Probolus. I have lived in Portland Ct for over 35 years and currently serve on the Board of Directors of Gilead Community Services. During this time I have been a volunteer for Parks and Rec, served on various town committees, been member and President of the Board of Education, as well as active in our local church. More recently I have served as on the Board of Directors of the Portland VNA and am currently on the Gilead Board.

I am a firm believer in community service and volunteering and giving back to the community. I also have relatives who have suffered through many years of mental illness and I am very concerned with how CT funds and provide for those who, through no fault of their own, struggle with the illness and the often times hurtful stigma associated with diseases that affect both the mind and body.

My involvement with Gilead has allowed me to see both the good and not so good means that we employ in serving both those suffering from mental illness and their families. I wish to take this opportunity to ask you to please be aware of the impact that your votes on this upcoming budget will have on the lives of clients we serve, their families, and the staff who provide such devoted and compassionate support to those dealing daily with their disabilities.

Hopefully, this awareness will lead you to consider their needs and act favorably on the programs requiring funding increases and also to come to the understanding of how, spending funds in key social safety net areas, will actual result in significant savings for the state. As a concerned citizen and one who has been an active volunteer, I want you to

understand that there is just so much that individuals in the community can do to help those who are in need.

The real support and service is provided by dedicated and professional staff, who are feeling the full force of the depressed economic times as they have gone through over 5 years of budgets where the state has failed to grant even a modest COLA increase for the programs being delivered in support of those most needy in our state. I am asking you to please consider support for a 7% COLA for these programs over the next 2 years so that this vital work can continue.

I am attaching a link to an article that appeared in February of 2006 in the The New Yorker by Malcolm Gladwell titled "Million Dollar Murray".

<http://archives.newyorker.com/?i=2006-02-13#folio=096>

I urge you to read this piece. Without getting into all the details of the article, it essentially reports on the life of a homeless person who suffered various ailments, some related to his mental illness. The article studies the costs incurred by the state of Colorado to treat "Murray", and contrasts how significant savings and quality of care could be realized by simply taking common sense approaches to "solve the problem" instead of trying to "manage the problem".

The article points out that NOT providing service to those with mental health problems costs the health-care and social services systems far more than anticipated. Estimates in New York were that at least sixty-two million dollars was being spent annually to shelter just twenty-five hundred hardcore homeless. "It costs twenty-four thousand dollars a year for one of these shelter beds, - a cot eighteen inches away from the next cot.

Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, a leading service group for the homeless in Boston, recently tracked the medical expenses of a hundred and nineteen chronically homeless people. In the course of five years, thirty three people died and seven more were sent to nursing homes, and the group still accounted for 18,834 emergency-room visits—at a minimum cost of a thousand dollars a visit. From a cost benefit standpoint, it would probably have been cheaper to provide each person a full-time nurse and their own apartment.

We are not advocating this, what we are asking for is to look at how a similar scale of savings can be realized by providing group homes to those in need rather than warehousing or abandoning those needing care. In addition these programs result in the creation of new jobs and benefits to the communities we serve.

For example, in the past two years, 13 clients have been transferred from long-term in-patient settings to specially-designed community programs at Gilead. Those transfers generated **40 new jobs**, and created a cost savings to the state of \$275,000/client/year. That's a **total savings of \$3,500,000 per year**.

For years Gilead has struggled with a widening gap between revenue and the cost of providing services. This has required reductions in both staff and services. I was pleased to see that the governor had approved a 1% increase last year. Unfortunately that 1% won't even cover the latest increase in our insurance or utility costs.

We view ourselves as partners with you and want to be part of the solution to the funding problems. We welcome an opportunity to discuss this and other cost-saving ideas with you in more detail.

In summary I would like for you to realize and then consider the value that Gilead and other non-profits provide to the state and those less fortunate in our communities who suffer from mental illness. Having considered all that is being done with zero increases over the past 5 years and another 2 with zero, I hope you will act to reestablish the funding levels needed to provide for these "Safety Net Services" that are vital to those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves struggling to live independent lives and in so doing be contributors in their communities and not viewed by the public as factors contributing to the financial problems we face in the state.

Consider this:

- Nonprofit human service providers play a vital role in the health and well-being of Connecticut's communities
- Nonprofit human service providers are employers and play an important role in Connecticut's economy
- Private nonprofits provide quality, efficient, cost-effective health and human services on behalf of the state
- Demand for health and human services has dramatically increased during the national recession
- Nonprofit health and human services providers represent the safety net that our state cannot afford to lose

**Any society, any nation, is judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members; the last, the least, the littlest.**

Thank you, and please find the will to help those who otherwise are being left behind. Help Gilead realize its mission to "... provide a broad range of high quality health care and recovery support services in

the home and community to improve mental health, physical well being, independence, and community integration for the individuals we serve.”