



Central Naugatuck Valley

HELP, Inc.

900 Watertown Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06708 Phone/Fax 203-756-8984

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

2.15.13

Regarding:

HB 6350: An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2015, and Other Provisions Relating to Revenue Health and Hospitals-DMHAS

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the committee, my name is Roberta Murtagh, and I'm here to represent Central Naugatuck Valley Help, Inc. This agency provides services to approximately 600 clients and their families per year, primarily for mental health and substance abuse treatment. The agency is a member of CT Nonprofits and CT Community Providers Association.

I'm here today because I'm gravely concerned about the effects that the Governor's proposed cuts to grant funding could have on our agency and agencies like ours who provide services to some of the state's most vulnerable citizens. The conversion to revenue from grants to Medicaid raises several issues that could adversely affect services. First of all, the vast majority of the clients we serve are already eligible for Medicaid. It is not as though a great number of our clients will become eligible in 2014 and we could then bill for their services. We already do. There are few individuals who do not qualify at this time. We will still have clients on spend down who we will not receive reimbursement for.

I'm here to stress to you that the system of substance abuse and mental health providers is fragile. We have gone for too long without increases to our funding levels to keep up with operating expenses, in addition to the fact that we have been unable to provide any cost of living increase to our staff since 2008. Twenty years of chronic underfunding is taking its toll. We lose good people in our field because of the poor pay. At the same time, the needs presented by the individuals we serve is ever increasingly challenging because of co-occurring medical, psychiatric and substance use disorders. The need for qualified staff is more necessary than ever before. While the ½ percent COLA for this year and 1% COLA for next year are significant in the face of no COLAs for so long, it simply isn't adequate. Our operating expenses continue to skyrocket as do the costs for medical benefits and other insurances. Adding on additional Medicaid billing also costs agency's money in terms of billing, tracking, documentation, credentials, and the administrative costs to perform those tasks.

Bonding money would undoubtedly be helpful to providers for specific uses. However, bonding does not negate the need for grant funding and for overdue COLAs which are desperately needed to recruit and to retain qualified staff by paying them a decent living wage.

The agency greatly appreciates the efforts of Commissioner Rehmer to protect and support the community services. We appreciate the support of legislators and the Governor in acknowledging the importance and the value of the work that we do.

I respectfully ask you, members of the Appropriations Committee, to protect the fragile safety net of providers.

Substance Abuse Services

Waterbury

- Rev. Edward M. Dempsey Drug Services (203) 756-8984

Danbury

- Travisano Network (203) 794-1975

Torrington

- Watkins Network (860) 482-7242

Mental Health Services

Waterbury

- Rogers House - (203) 756-4029
- Glenlunan - (203) 754-5276
- Kinsella Commons - (203) 597-9008

Torrington

- Wynnewood Residential Services (860) 482-1319