

Written Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 15, 2013
DMHAS and DPH Budget

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Matthew Sheehan and I live in Glastonbury.

I am gravely concerned about the Governor's proposal to balance the budget on the backs of those of us with mental health care needs. Obtaining health care in the state of Connecticut has been a substantial struggle for me during these past few years, whether it has pertained to the staffing and technological issues with the Department of Social Services or having to make very difficult choices between either receiving medical coverage or obtaining gainful employment.

The silver lining to this dark cloud has been the outpatient clinical services that I receive through Inter Community in East Hartford. I am fortunate that Medicaid covers these services at the moment and that at one point in time I was able to pay on a sliding scale which was vastly more affordable than therapists in private practice. And the quality of Inter Community's services, for me and countless others, is not only a lifeline but has made all the difference in assisting us toward being positive and productive members of our communities rather than "burdens" as labeled by some pundits.

If the governor's budget goes through as proposed, what I believe is a fifty percent cut to Inter Community's outpatient clinic budget would be, in one word, catastrophic. I am also worried that issues with the Department of Social Services could be further exasperated. But in light of what happened in Sandy Hook, calling this unconscionable would be kind. Contrary to many media reports, people with mental illness are first, no more violent than the general population; second, more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators; finally, more likely to harm oneself than harm other individuals. Still, the timing is right for having an overdue dialogue on these issues.

On a related note, "witch-hunting" and labeling individuals with mental health needs is not going to make for safer communities, but is most likely to have the opposite effect. Individuals are not going to come forward if they fear the social stigma, or worse, legal repercussions. The governor is right that we need to change our attitudes, and increase access and awareness. But I am very disappointed in this mixed message of by reducing options and opportunities available. Substantially cutting Inter Community's funding would be an unconscionable step backward, and frankly is an insult to those who lost their lives in Sandy Hook and their loved ones as well.

Thank you for your consideration.