

Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, Inc.

The citizen's voice in mental health policy.

Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

February 18, 2014

To the Members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Eastern Regional Mental Health Board is a private nonprofit responsible for evaluating state-funded mental health programs, assessing strengths and unmet needs, and making recommendations for improvements to the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services. We have nearly forty years of experience working with local communities and educating them about the abilities of people with mental illnesses to experience recovery and live full and meaningful lives. We respectfully request that you consider the following comments in connection with the FY 2014 budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services:

Young Adult Services: Please expand funding for Young Adult Services (YAS) to include supports for young adults that do not fit the current parameters of the program, including those that have not been identified for DCF supports, or who are experiencing their first mental health crisis. Currently, DMHAS' Young Adult Services program is only open to youth who have been involved in the DCF system and are transitioning into the DMHAS system. Of the approximately 18,000 of young adults in the system, only about 1,100 are currently served through YAS. These services are effective for those who receive them, but are far too limited in availability.

As you may be aware, the typical age of onset for severe mental illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia and bipolar illness is during the late teens and early 20s, just when most young adults are leaving home to begin college or work. Without family supports or accessible services, and in the face of archaic college and university policies that remove students with mental health problems from school, these individuals often are not identified until too late. Equally troubling is the number of young people who develop mental health problems in childhood, but receive inappropriate services or no services at all. As a result, these individuals have no assistance in transitioning to adulthood, and their ability to become independent adults is severely impacted.

Anti-stigma Campaign: We support the Governor's proposal to dedicate funding to an anti-stigma campaign, and ask that Connecticut's five Regional Mental Health Boards be included in designing and disseminating this campaign. The Regional Boards have existed since 1974, and in connection with their statutory mandate, have been educating their communities about mental health issues since their inception. Our organizations possess a great deal of combined expertise and experience in conducting community outreach and stigma-busting activities. We know what works and what doesn't.

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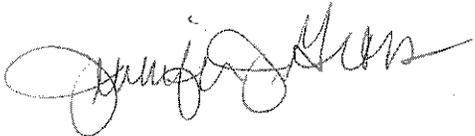
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Supportive Housing: We applaud and strongly support the Governor's proposal for an additional 110 units of supportive housing, including \$1.1 million for supportive services for scattered site supportive housing and \$1.1 million for Rental Assistance Program (RAP) vouchers for individuals with psychiatric disabilities--located in the Department of Housing (DOH) budget. Supportive Housing has a proven track record for helping people with behavioral health issues to live successfully in their communities. It's also cost-effective: the price tag for housing and the accompanying wrap-around supports is far lower than institutional care, jail, the ER, or homeless shelters, with far better results.

We are grateful for your past efforts, particularly during the 2013 legislative session, to building on previous investments in Connecticut's quality mental health system. Some highlights include increased funding for Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, Peer Bridger services, and supportive housing. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the nation's premiere mental health advocacy organization, released its "Grading the States" reports in 2006 and 2009, giving Connecticut an overall "B", the highest grade given either year. The nation's overall grade was a "D". Connecticut was the only state to receive an "A" in any category.

Connecticut is a national leader in providing mental health services that work. Please continue to build on Connecticut's past successes by preserving and expanding proven services and programs for individuals living with mental illness.

Sincerely,



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