



**Testimony of Luis B. Perez Pres/CEO of MHAC
Opposed to the Lack of COLA in the Budget Adjustments
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Good Evening Senator Beth Bye and Representative Toni Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Luis B. Perez LCSW. I am the President and CEO of the Mental Health Association of Connecticut, Inc. an organization dedicated to working and advocating for everyone's mental health for over 106 years. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to the continued lack of appropriate funding for non-Medicaid reimbursable services provided to persons who are eligible for services in the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) budget.

MHAC provides adult residential support services to over 1,000 adults in the central and western regions of Connecticut. Our services make it possible for these citizens to enjoy a life in the community and avoid hospitalizations. The only cost of living adjustment (COLA) nonprofits such as MHAC have received in the last 10 years is a 1% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for one half of one year amounting to .05% increase for one year out of the last ten years. Yet, we continue to support clients in partnership with the state to ensure a safety net that meets the needs of so many residents and avoids costlier services.

As you know, more and more Connecticut residents are in need of the vital and sometimes life saving services nonprofit such as those MHAC provides. At the same time

we continue to struggle to provide these services in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. This has been a difficult task with no COLA since 2008. The lack of funding has negatively impacted our agency causing us to consolidate services and to delay hiring. There is a serious need for a Cost of Living Adjustment or COLA. We hope the committee will take this year with a budget surplus to address the chronic underfunding of nonprofit agencies such as MHAC. We request that the Committee consider making a COLA adjustment.

I would like to ask you to continue to support several worthy initiatives which are highlighted in the budget adjustment, such as \$1.1 million in supportive housing in scattered sites and \$1.1 million for Rental Assistance Program (RAP) vouchers for individuals with psychiatric disabilities (located in the Department of Housing, DOH, and budget). It is commendable that the Governor has proposed funding to an anti-stigma campaign which is discrimination and unfairly disadvantages persons who experience mental health challenges. Expanding the funding for young adult services to include young adults that are experiencing their first mental health break will make Young Adult Services accessible to all youth not just those 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 able to be served in the Young Adult Services and could benefit from those services. We applaud the investments in mental health services such as increased funding for Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, Peer Bridger services, and supportive housing and urge you to continue to build on these gains made.

Thank you.