

Appropriations Committee  
DHMAS Budget Hearing  
February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
Kristen Tierney

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Kristen Tierney; I'm a lifelong caregiver of a non-custodial family member. I represent caregivers through my business Turtles & Lemonade.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and investment in mental health services provided in last years final budget. This investment is important to all residents of our state and most importantly to those who can't be here to advocate for themselves. Your work last session and funded efficient, successful programs like the Peer Bridger service, supportive housing and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT teams. Your thoughtful work meant the world to caregivers and our loved ones throughout the state.

Today I'm asking for your support of the following Mental Health Initiatives proposed by our Governor:

- Most important to me would be the expansion of funding for youth services to include young adults that are experiencing their first mental health risk. This is where there is the most hope for a successful outcome, full recovery and opportunity for our loved ones to land on their feet instead of struggle with housing and employment throughout their lives. Without support too many productive people are forced into poverty for their adult lives. Our loved ones need support with their first frightening mental health crisis and we as caregivers want this too. Many caregivers have no idea how to help their loved ones when mental illness strikes (late teens to early twenties onset is most common), DHMAS does. Our state financially benefits from early access to these programs by keeping people off state services for a lifetime. DHMAS is known for their successful and efficient programs.

- We need children currently in the DCF system to have access to these programs as they transition to DHMAS.
- Please support 100 additional units of supportive housing, including the \$1.1million for supportive services for scattered site supportive house and \$1.1 million for Rental Assistance Programs (RAP) vouchers for individuals with psychiatric disabilities (DOH budget item).
- Increased funding for transitional and residential services for high risk populations, including young adults.
- To fund established mental health advocacy community entities to heighten awareness through their channels on stigma and community education on mental health issues, through funding the proposed and much needed anti-stigma campaign.

The investment of funds for these programs will not only serve our loved ones but all Connecticut citizens. Early intervention and support works. Access to care and support successfully mitigate long terms costs and dependence on the system. Our loved ones want to live and thrive independently, this funding gives them a chance. The alternative is dependence, the street or jail all of which cost the state and society much more.

Thank you again for your thoughtful consideration of the issues that we and our loved ones face daily. Last session was very heartening, with your help we're moving in the right direction No progress could have been made without you, and it didn't go unnoticed.