



Advocacy and Action
for Connecticut's
Mental Health

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 27, 2015**

**IN OPPOSITION TO
Department of Children and Families (DCF) budget cuts
Governor's proposed FY 2016-17 biennial budget**

Good afternoon Senator Bye and Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Susan Kelley and I am the Public Policy Manager of Child/Adolescent/Young Adult Issues for the National Alliance on Mental Health of Connecticut (NAMI Connecticut). NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved mental health services and an end to stigma and discrimination. We represent individuals who live with mental illness and parents and family members of individuals living with mental illness. I am also speaking today on behalf of the Keep the Promise Children's Committee (KTP). NAMI CT and KTP oppose proposed reductions to DCF's budget.

The proposed cuts contradict the state's commitment to children's mental health that was made under PA 13-178 concerning DCF's development of a comprehensive, statewide Children's Behavioral Health Plan (Children's Plan). Released in October, the Children's Plan recognizes that while there are many innovative and effective programs in the state, Connecticut's children's mental health system as a whole is broken and makes many recommendations for needed changes. The proposed DCF budget cuts will undermine implementation of the Plan and erode existing programs that currently provide critical services to our most vulnerable children with high-needs.

We would also like to remind the Committee that DCF remains under federal court supervision concerning meeting the needs of children in its care. The proposed reductions may further jeopardize DCF's ability to improve care quality for children. In its most recent report, the federal court-appointed monitor continued to caution against further reductions in congregate care to save money without "meaningful investment in . . . services that meet the complex needs of those children remaining in its care." We share these concerns.

Turning to specific budget items, we oppose the following:

- **Transfer of Judicial Dept.'s CSSD Juvenile Programming to DCF:** This proposed transfer would result in a \$10 million cut to services for pre-adjudicatory services for

children at-risk of entering or who are in the juvenile justice system. These pre-adjudication programs include trauma based services, mental health services and substance abuse services that divert youth from court, keep them out of detention, and reduce their likelihood of requiring more services and/or reoffending. CSSD has been very effective in providing these pre-adjudicatory services. Moving the services to DCF to save money is nonsensical; we should not be making cuts to “fix” something that is not broken.

- **Reducing congregate care (2 therapeutic homes, one short term assessment, and respite home):** We agree with the premise that children are generally better off at home. We nevertheless share the concerns of the federal court-appointed monitor that DCF’s efforts to save money by reducing congregate care (2.6 million) without sufficient reinvestment tied to community based-services is jeopardizing the well-being of our state’s most vulnerable children.
- **Reduction in Voluntary services program:** Many families with commercial insurance do not have access to intensive psychiatric services for their children as families do in the public sector. These families must rely on the voluntary services through DCF in order to gain access to high level psychiatric services and placements for children with complex needs. The proposed cut of \$500,000 to voluntary services will further hinder their ability to get needed services for their children. The increase of insured individuals under the Affordable Care Act will not change this lack of access to intensive mental health services for children whose families are privately insured.
- **Reductions to youth employment and trainings contracts:** Proposed \$887,000 reduction in youth employment and training services will have a substantial negative impact on the ability of DCF and non-DCF youth, particularly with mental health conditions, to transition successfully to adulthood and attain financial stability. This cut will lead to greater costs in the long run because research shows that these young adults aging out of the child welfare system are more likely to experience a myriad of problems requiring state system involvement such as behavioral health issues, unemployment, homelessness, and criminal involvement. (Courtney, ME, & Dworsky, A. (2005). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 19*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago). Further, the cuts are contrary to the recommendations of the Feb. 2014 Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, “Department of Children and Families Services to Prepare Youth Aging Out of State Care,” which calls for building training and employment opportunities (pgs 59-69; available at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/pri/docs/2013/DCF%20Age%20Out%20Staff%20F&R%20Report.pdf>).

Thank you very much for this opportunity to address the Appropriations Committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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NAMI Connecticut; Staff to Keep the Promise Coalition