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Testimony before the Appropriation Committee Opposing any DMHAS cuts on March 6, 2015

Good Evening Co-Chair Senator Bye, Representative Gonzalez and committee members.

My name is Joanie Masot. I am here opposing any DMHAS cuts to this year's budget. I understand the situation our state is facing with the budget and the very difficult position all of you are in with making cuts throughout the state.

I am a person in recovery with lived experience. Although my recovery is strong today and I am healthy and living a good quality of life, it is because of the programs and the agencies in place in our State. I can wholeheartedly sit before you tonight and tell you that if it was not for these agencies and programs I would be in jail or my life would have ended long ago. I have a large support network with my recovery and it is still a daily struggle in today's world.

I am blessed and very fortunate today as I am an employee of Advocacy Unlimited which I was able to be employed with Advocacy Unlimited even with a negative background and being in recovery.

One of the proposed cuts to the DMHAS budget is to remove funding for the regional boards in CT. With doing this these boards would not be able to exist. We would not have the regional boards available to get people the services, programs that they need. With that being said it would affect so many adults say nothing of our youth. Where will these people turn? Another piece of the budget cuts is to the CT Legal Rights Project (CLRP) which supports persons who are part of the DMHAS system with issues. This project has great professionals who work with many people with great success. Reducing their funding would have a huge impact on our mental health system in our state. This again is a project that is working. I ask you to please save our people in our state with not cutting in places that are working. That would be me today if I was in my situation 10 years ago and was trying to change my life after returning from prison and being a problem gambler and in the mental health system.

I share hope with others every day in my work today and I cannot imagine not having these services, programs, boards in place to not be able to share the hope of living a good quality of life in our communities. I am proof that these such things in place work. Otherwise, as I said earlier, I wouldn't be sitting here this evening with the opportunity to speak to all of you. I can guarantee I would be back in jail or my life would have ended many years ago. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you tonight.