

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

On the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget

March 6, 2015

Diane Frost, Stamford CT

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

My name is **Diane Frost** and I am registered to vote in Stamford CT. I work at **Bridges... a Community Support System** in Milford and West Haven the Local Mental Health Authority.

I am here to testify on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget.

I am opposed to the proposed cuts to the **Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)**. Without appropriate funding of grant accounts, behavior health providers will be forced to close or drastically reduce outpatient programs, will no longer be available to maintain services that the most in-need clients in their communities. Individuals with mental health needs will not disappear. They may end up having access to only high-end or crisis level care, such as emergency rooms or hospitals, or even end up becoming homeless.

Our state's wide network of highly skilled and experienced professionals work in community based settings. They provide best practices, evidenced-based programs designed to meet the multiple and diverse needs of adults, children, and families services. These services are effective, but chronically underfunded.

Medicaid reimbursement rates don't cover the cost of care, leaving providers to operate at a loss for services rendered. This is illustrated in a report by the *Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA)*, of which we're a member, which studies the real cost of care versus revenues of private providers. Among the behavioral health services, for example, rates are so low that they lose more than \$27 million every year in the underfunding of the most utilized services, accounting for 75 percent of total service hours urge you to fully fund crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

In 1995 I didn't know what to do. I was in crisis and alone in college in Washington D.C. After my desperate phone call to my mother, she told me to go across the street to the hospital, where I stayed for five days. I sought relief, which came with a diagnosis and treatment. I was discharged for outpatient treatment in Stamford.

I live productively, now, with bipolar and generalized anxiety disorders. The Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) close to my housing taught me coping skills, the importance of medication management, and community engagement. I could have been someone living without proper treatment in Connecticut My recovery informs me that no one replaces people lost for lack of crucial funding.

Now, I take pride in living a good healthy life and helping others for a living. Employed by *Bridges*, I work with young adults, and have worked with older people. All are destitute, living precariously within the shrinking state mental health care budget.

Underfunding is a barrier that providers are already finding hard to overcome. With less state support, my colleagues are able to do less. Providers hoping to help individuals who are vulnerable keep their care know that there's not much more they can do, if these proposed budget cuts were approved. It is in sadness that I say that the importance of continued treatment of these individuals is so necessary. Otherwise, they will have no place to go unless their services are funded appropriately, now. In that case, countless adults and young adults will have to fend for themselves in finding Medicaid reimbursed psychiatrists, nurses, and case managers.

Additionally, if proposed cuts are made in this biennial budget to the Regional Mental Health Boards, our voice in advocacy will be lost. The \$585,000 it takes, to fund an average of two positions at each of the five Regional Mental Health Boards, brings in innumerable benefits, least of all a generated \$23 million in federal funds, and a multi-stakeholder voice in mental health planning, implementation and oversight, which would be lost after 40 years working with all of us to be heard.

Thank you for your attention to these important services and supports.