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

Good Evening Co-Chair Senator Beth Bye and Co-Chair Representative Minnie Gonzalez

My name is Linda Lentini and I am a registered voter in the town of Plainville CT. I am here opposing any DMHAS cuts to this years budget. I understand that the state is facing a budget crisis that is causing a hardship to many people. You are faced with a difficult task of determining where the cuts will occur, budget cuts that have to happen and will hurt agencies throughout CT. You have a difficult task ahead of you.

All of that being said we cannot afford any cuts to the DMHAS budget, an agency that supports people with psychiatric histories. Our state had a number of knowledgeable people meeting, for 2 years, to suggest changes in the mental health system on how we can support people that are facing challenges with their mental health. This advisory group gathered information that can save people's lives. How would cuts to the DMHAS budget support those proposed suggestions?

On a daily basis I speak to people that have a psychiatric history and struggle with many areas in their lives including being discriminated against because of their histories. How about the person who is denied housing or loses their housing because of their psychiatric history? How about the parents that lose their children because of their history? Who will help them keep their children? How about a person that has a court appointed conservator of person and finances and that conservator is not defending their rights? How about the person who wants their wishes honored especially when they cannot speak for themselves and want to fill out an Advanced Directive? Who will help them with this process and make sure it is honored when they go to the doctors or the hospital?

Ct Legal Rights Project (CLRP) has a team of professionals that support people who are part of the DMHAS system and face these issues. The staff is made up of some very knowledgeable professionals who care about the people they support. These two qualities are hard to find especially in the legal field. Reducing CLRP's funding would decrease the amount of people they can support and this could ripple into a bigger issue of frustration, helplessness and loss of hope. It would have a negative impact on the mental health system in CT.

I am a person with lived experience who faces challenges in my life and continue to work on things on a daily basis. My life is filled with people who support and care about me, that continues to be a lifesaver. My life was saved by people that work at agencies similar to CLRP and the regional boards. What would have happened if these agencies did not exist.

I work at Advocacy Unlimited and we support people with psychiatric histories by providing education, advocacy, holistic alternatives and resources.

Many people that call Advocacy Unlimited face challenges with little to no support in their life. One of the items on the proposed cuts to the DMHAS budget is to eliminate funding for the regional boards in CT. This would mean that the regional boards would not exist. Regional boards bring people together to have community conversations about mental health. These conversations encourage people from communities around CT to talk about things that can change and how we can work together to make change happen. Eliminating the regional boards would slow the process of change in CT and eliminate an opportunity for people with lived experience to get involved in making changes. "Nothing about Us Without Us". The regional board works on making sure everyone, especially people that get services, are at the table.

As we move forward in CT and hopefully work together to support people in our state we should make responsible choices that will not destroy things that matter to so many people. Our choices will impact our future and the future of our children. We have many young adults here today that are sharing their story to put a face on recovery and lived experience. Many adults and young adults have been failed by the mental health system and directly hurt by cuts to budgets, let's save our state by making sure this doesn't happen today or in the future.

Many people would have loved to testified today but transportation continues to be an issue for many people. It would be great to allow people to Skype in so they can still give testimony in person.