



**TESTIMONY OF
Eastern Connecticut Health Network
Manchester Memorial Hospital
Rockville General Hospital
SUBMITTED TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Friday, March 6, 2015**

HB 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue

Eastern Connecticut Health Network (ECHN) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue**. ECHN opposes the proposed reduction in Medicaid coverage for some adults and the \$25 million in grant funding cuts for mental health treatment. What we need is a strong policy and a modest investment in a plan to provide care to these patients in need.

ECHN's Hospitals play a critical role in providing all types of medical services to Connecticut residents, including extensive mental and behavioral health programs and services. We serve more than 12,000 inpatients and 164,000 outpatients each year, and this includes 4,000 adults and children that we treat for behavioral health-related conditions. For years, ECHN has committed substantial resources to address what is a growing challenge for patients, families and our communities. We are proud of the highly competent staff of psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and other mental behavioral health professionals who provide inpatient care, partial hospitalization programming and outpatient treatment to both adults and adolescents. We offer specialty programs that include an accredited high school for adolescents needing psychiatric care and a program for adults and adolescents with eating disorders.

We are on the front line treating over 3,000 patients with behavioral health crises last year in our emergency departments. A patient experiencing a mental health crisis could spend days, or even weeks, in our ED waiting for a bed in an appropriate facility, or waiting to be transitioned to the right outpatient setting, simply because there are not enough resources

available to meet the constant need. Extended stays in the ED can be stressful and exacerbate a patient's condition rather than improve it. This problem is particularly acute for children and adolescents, for whom the need for services greatly outstrips the number of available beds and trained specialists.

This is a problem in all care settings. There are long waits and financial or resource limitations to accessing therapeutic/residential placement, appropriate clinical treatment services, and supportive housing. It can take months to schedule an outpatient visit with an adolescent mental health specialist.

These are some of the very real and negative results of ever-diminishing funding for vital behavioral health services, and the problem will grow if the Governor's proposed budget is enacted. The Governor's proposed budget would reduce Medicaid coverage for some adults and cut close to \$25 million in grants to fund mental health treatment. These reductions will tax the state's mental health system, intensifying the already extreme burden placed on our ED and outpatient clinics as we deliver mental health services.

In 2014, the Connecticut Hospital Association convened a Subcommittee on Mental Health, comprising hospital behavioral health directors, emergency medicine physicians, chief executives, chief financial officers, and government affairs experts charged with developing recommendations to improve health outcomes, relieve the burden on EDs, and improve the adequacy of funding for key mental health safety net services.

The Connecticut Hospital Association has determined that an appropriation of \$3 million to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services will be sufficient to support grants to hospitals across the state for CCTs and related care coordination services, specifically for administrators to manage the CCTs and navigators/intensive case managers to coordinate the mental health and social service needs of each patient.

We are asking you to oppose cuts to the mental health system and, instead, invest in turning this innovative, community-based solution into a statewide best practice that will benefit patients, relieve pressure on providers, and achieve savings for the state.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.