

**Testimony presented by Christina Inferrera**  
**On behalf of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board**  
**Before the Appropriations Committee**  
**March 3, 2015**  
**IN OPPOSITION TO:**  
**Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget**

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

My name is Christina Inferrera, Service Coordinator for South Park Inn Emergency Shelter in Hartford, and Chair Person of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board. I am also a lifelong Connecticut resident, and a registered voter in the town of Colchester.

I am here to testify in regards to the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget. I am opposed to the proposed cuts to The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

This budget proposes to eliminate \$585,000.00 from the Regional Mental Health Boards. This essentially dismantles a group that provides essential oversight and intervention across the state. With an average of only two paid staff members, these boards mobilizes over 500 volunteers to serve our state and local communities.

I have served the North Central Regional Mental Health Board since 1998, entirely as a volunteer and a concerned citizen of Connecticut. The services and contributions that the North Central Regional Mental Health Board has made, and continues to make, are numerous and significant.

I am here today to speak to just one of those contributions. As previously stated, I work at South Park Inn Emergency shelter. My position is to engage and assist many of the most vulnerable citizens that struggle with mental illness and homelessness in our shelter. In the late 1990s, it was clear that many of these individuals were not receiving the level of services that they needed and deserved. State mental health hospitals had been closed, and the demand for outpatient services quickly overwhelmed existing providers. Clients had limited access to necessary medications, case management services could not appropriately follow up with care plans, and a dangerous level of untreated individuals was observed in shelter and emergency room settings.

In order to advocate for these shelter residents, I was encouraged to get involved with Catchment Area Council 23 in the Hartford area, which is a part of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board. I began volunteering, and sharing my observations with members of the committee. Based on this information, a series of evaluations was completed, and services to

this population throughout the state were improved. Throughout my seventeen year involvement with the Catchment Area Council 23 and North Central Regional Mental Health Board, these types of conversations and interventions have been ongoing. These groups are the community voice in oversight, coordination, and evaluation of the Behavioral Health system in our state.

Please do not silence these voices. In cutting these funds, you are severing an important link between citizens and state funded mental health services. The North Central Regional Mental Health Board often hears from family members, friends, and consumers that do not otherwise know how to find assistance or advocate for themselves. The North Central Regional Mental Health Board bridges these gaps to ensure that quality care and services are available to all in need.

I urge the Committee to restore the funding allocated to the North Central Regional Mental Health Board, and other Regional Mental Health Boards across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your careful consideration of this matter.