



Testimony to the Appropriations Public Hearing 3/6/15

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and the Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Gary Steck. I am the Chief Executive Officer of **Wellmore Behavioral Health**. Wellmore is based in Waterbury but operates 13 sites in western Connecticut providing life-span behavioral health care and support to over 13,500 people each year.

First and foremost I request the committee fully refund the DMHAS grant fund for outpatient services (\$25,000,000) and secondly I urge you to reject the massive proposed Medicaid rate cuts as the current rates already leave providers to operate at a loss, as documented by the recently published Connecticut Community Provider Cost Study (2/2015).

On December 13, 2012 at the CCPA Annual Conference, as the chair of the CCPA Board, I begged Governor Malloy to refrain from cutting funding for behavioral health care. He said "*I can't make any promises*". But a day later, when twenty of my staff and I were first responders to the tragedy at Sandy Hook, everything seemed to change. Suddenly there seemed to be a clear understanding of the importance of readily accessible care. There were calls for enhanced capacity and access to treatment and support. We were told the cuts would be reversed.

But fast forward two years and despite a new *Children's Behavioral Health Plan* and the *Sandy Hook Advisory Commission Report*, both of which call for changes in the behavioral health system and enhanced capacity, not only has there been no new resources for capacity, but cuts to behavioral health care have been implemented! Couched in erroneous assumptions, grossly inadequate Medicaid rates and concurrent cuts to state funding has already results in rationing of care and service reduction.

The proposed budget with its cuts to DMHAS grants and threatened massive Medicaid rate reductions will cripple the system. As providers we will all be doing 'less with less'. There will be a dramatic (further) reduction in access, programs will close statewide and treatment will be disrupted.

At Wellmore we will be forced to reduce or eliminate care for hundreds in need, such as those struggling with addiction and/or in need of medication therapies. We have already been rationing care for almost two years as inadequate Medicaid rates, a lack of cost of living increases and cuts to our various state contracts forced us to reduce our workforce by almost two dozen positions. In particular, two full time



nursing positions that were primarily dedicated to medication therapies were a part of these cuts.

There is no back-up for community providers and non-profit clinics. There is no 'Plan B'. The proposed budget lacks the vision for a better Connecticut that we all so desperately need. It flies in the face of both common sense and public expectation that the system for behavioral health will not only be there for all state residents, but also that the system will be enhanced and improved. It appears completely disconnected from policy encouraging health care access and recovery. And, most importantly, it frankly lacks compassion for those in need!

I urge you to restore full DMHAS grant funding and reject the massive proposed cuts to Medicaid rates for providers.

Thank you for your service to the people of the State of Connecticut, as yours is truly a difficult role. I pray God grants you the wisdom and courage to do what is right.

Respectfully,

Gary M. Steck, LMFT
Chief Executive Officer
Wellmore, Inc.
3/6/15