



*Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:*

H.B. No. 6824: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue.

Submitted By: Valerie S. Williams, Executive Director, Keystone House, Norwalk

March 6, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Valerie Williams, I am the Executive Director of Keystone House in Norwalk. I am here on behalf of our 17 Board members who live and vote in Norwalk, Wilton, Westport, Stamford and Fairfield, our 39 employees who live and vote in Norwalk, Stratford, Trumbull, Bridgeport, Stamford, Westport, Fairfield, Southbury, Waterbury, Newtown, and Greenwich. I am also here on behalf of the over 200 individuals Keystone works with each year and their families who live and vote in towns throughout CT. Further, Keystone House is one of over 500 member agencies of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits.)

I am here to share my concerns with H.B. 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue. In particular, I wanted to express my sincere concerns about the DMHAS budget, particularly to funding of POS- Purchase of Services contract with nonprofits. Continued flat funding is a reduction in funding and threatens critical services to individuals and families in our service area.

At Keystone House we work with adults over the age of 18 who have a mental illness that has been deemed severe and prolonged. The symptoms of the illness often make everyday life a struggle. We have 2 group homes, for 20 clients, staffed 24/7- including blizzards, ice storms, hurricane warnings and every holiday. We have one home for 6 individuals that is also staffed 24/7. Our staff provide case management and residential support to over 55 clients who live in their own apartments. Our social rehabilitation program opens at 8:30 in the morning, we always have people waiting to come in, no matter the weather. Programs like Keystone are critical to our clients' lives, their families' lives and also the community. There is no cure for mental illness but there is recovery. It is not going to save any money if we close a group home, or stop providing case management services. Mental illness will not just go away- the individuals needing supports will get them, but at a much higher price. The service provision will shift to our police departments, jails, emergency rooms, libraries, community colleges, area businesses, elderly family members, public transportation providers and homeless shelters.

The reality is that nonprofit providers, like Keystone House, have been pushed to our breaking point due to the lack of investment over the past two decades. There isn't a day that goes by that I am not thinking about how Keystone can continue to provide these needed and necessary services. I worry that you, our

legislators, have such a daunting task to meet the needs of every resident and taxpayer in CT that you might inadvertently make a reduction in the DMHAS budget to POS accounts. Or not realize that flat funding is a reduction. While the CPI has risen 8.52% over the past 5 years, POS contracts have only increased 1%. Your nonprofits are in trouble and you need to pay attention.

As members of the Appropriations Committee work toward creating your 'Recommended Budget' for SFY16 and 17, I am asking that you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure that critical programs such as those offered at DMHAS funded not for profits are fully funded.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

Valerie S. Williams, Keystone House, Inc., 147 Main Street, Norwalk, CT 06851. 203-956-7920  
vwilliams@keystonehouse.org