



Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget

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Robert Francis, Executive Director

Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP) -Bridgeport, CT

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Robert Francis, the Executive Director of RYASAP, a non-profit organization serving the Greater Bridgeport area. I am opposed to the proposed cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. If the \$736,000 proposed cut is implemented as proposed, the work of the Regional Action Council would be eliminated and would have a harmful effect on the communities that my organization serves. I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

RYASAP was started as a prevention coalition, which won support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The success of the partnership and the foundation support inspired the SAMHSA "Drug Free Community" grants. The model was then replicated state-wide to what we have known as the "RAC". DMHAS adopted the Regional Action Council concept to ensure that the Local Prevention Councils in all 169 communities received the technical assistance that they need to implement community strategies to prevention substance abuse and encourage positive wellness strategies.

Although we have seen successes in prevention during these 25 years, there is still more work to be done:

- With the steady increase of marijuana use among youth, more education and awareness programs have to be developed to counteract its low perceived risk among our most vulnerable residents.
- Although we have seen a steady decrease of cigarette use (5% of our regions youth, SIS 2014), many youth are picking up e-cigarettes for the first time and at alarming rates (24%, SIS 2014). E-cigarettes are not regulated by the FDA and is marketed to youth through deceptively attractive advertising and fun flavors. More education and training is needed at the community-level to address this emerging trend.
- From the work that we do throughout our region on increasing the 40 Developmental Assets among youth, mentoring and positive relationships with adults are key strategies to their development. Continued exposure to positive experiences, settings and people, as well as opportunities to gain and refine life skills, supports young people in the acquisition and growth of these assets.
- Studies show that the more assets that young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive. Research shows that youth with the most assets are least likely to engage in four different patterns of high-risk behavior, including problem alcohol use, violence, illicit drug use, and sexual activity. When they have higher levels of assets, they are more likely to do well in school, be civically engaged, and value diversity. All Local Prevention Councils work directly with survey results to better gauge their prevention efforts.

Please think carefully about the ripple effect the lack of funding to the RAC will have on building prevention throughout our communities.

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RYASAP Programs include:

- Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance
- Health Promotion & Wellness
- Parent Leadership Training Institute
- Public Allies Connecticut
- Restorative Justice
- Safe Asleep: Smoke Alarm Installation
- YouthINC

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