

Testimony of Norma Kirwan, Psy.D. (Director, Dorothy Bennett Behavioral Health Center) and Andrea Budweiser, Ed.M. (Case Management Coordinator) at Optimus Health Care, Stamford, Connecticut

Concerning funding for Regional Action Council and Southwest Regional Mental Health Board

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

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services – March 6, 2015

We are offering testimony in strong opposition to the proposed cuts to the Regional Action Councils and Southwest Regional Mental Health Board. As providers we have found both of these programs to be crucial in providing education, outreach and advocacy to consumers, their families and providers throughout the region. Their resource guides are often revised, expanded and translated into Spanish for that underserved population. Through their efforts last year, over 900 individuals received free mental health screenings with referrals made for one third of the participants. This free screening is offered annually. In addition, these agencies take part in critical review and evaluation of community behavioral health and substance abuse programs, ensuring access to quality services and acting in a watchdog capacity.

In the region in which we both live and work these programs have promoted greater awareness of mental health and substance abuse issues and services through social media, which has been particularly effective with teens and young adults. They have brought community events, support groups and state-of-the-art trainings to educate the public and providers in underserved communities.

This reduction in funding does not just reduce mental health and substance abuse services, it could result in the collapse of the regional mental health boards and the regional action councils in this area. This would leave a critical gap in our service system which we, as direct providers, would be unable to fill. We urge you to maintain the funding for these programs as no other structure represents the community's voice and provides independent oversight.

Thank you,

Norma Kirwan, Psy.D and Andrea Budweiser, EdM