

March 7, 2015

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Bye and Rep. Minnie Gonzalez, all Appropriations Committee Members and Health Subcommittee:

I am well aware that you face incredibly difficult decisions. I am also well aware that you have a very small part of the budget that you can influence. With that small part, I would hope that your decision making will take a very serious look at investment strategies- **where will we get the biggest return on dollars spent?**

There are a number of funds which your proposal cuts which I am very concerned about because I am convinced that these cuts will in fact cost me and my family many times more dollars, thereby having the opposite impact of a cut. I call these "cuts in sheep's clothing" and hope you will not be sucked into their falsehood.

Prevention dollars affect 316,000 residents in Greater Bridgeport area through the direction of the Regional Action Council (RAC). Our local RAC, RYASAP, provides technical assistance and on-going training to our Local Prevention Council as well as participating in other subcommittees working to increase assets in Stratford young people as well as destigmatizing mental health and increasing suicide prevention efforts.

As reported in our latest youth survey (which our RAC implements free-of-charge to our community), only 52% of young people report marijuana as a perceived risky drug whereas alcohol, prescription drugs, and tobacco are all ranked extremely high by comparison. With the landscape around marijuana use changing, young people are being bombarded with differing (and often) confusing messaging around marijuana use. It is our community's expectation that young people are supported by adults and build resistance skills as they grow into responsible adults. It is important that local coalitions and prevention councils stay abreast of messaging to inform parents and to keep young people safe.

The work of these organizations must be funding priorities. They change the trajectory of lives and as spending is looked at, what other initiatives are in fact helped by this funding?

- We pump money into improving highways for safety yet alcohol, drug (and now increasing marijuana use) put us in jeopardy when traveling on our roads.
- Programs which make drugs and alcohol less available (medical drop boxes and checks to deter underage sales) are of clear value.
- Teens think they are invincible and are seen texting all over the place as they drive- all programs which help them make better/safer decisions should be supported.
- We also know that teens who get involved, who feel they have community support, do better in school, are less likely to be victims of abuse and are less suicidal. So lets invest here so that we need fewer police, have fewer accidents, and have stronger communities where our youth succeed and go on to have jobs and pay taxes.
- Family mental health cost us dollars on the social services side (unemployment, DSS, and medicaid) just to name a few. Putting our collective impact on underlying causes and prevention will instead increase school success, employment and ultimately produce revenue.

Please think carefully about the return-on-investment that funding these areas will ultimately give to all other budget areas.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jocelyn Ault