

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget
March 6, 2015
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Proposed Cuts to CT Prevention Network/Regional Action Councils

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Wendy Bentivegna and I am writing to testify on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget. 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 my Regional Action Councils (RACs) would be eliminated and would have a harmful effect on the communities I work with. I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

As the co-chair of my Local Prevention Council, the Fairfield Cares Community Coalition, as well as Director of the Fairfield County Alliance To Prevent Substance Abuse (FCA-PSA, a tri-community collaboration), I have been fortunate to work with, and have the support of, 3 RACs in Fairfield County. Both Coalitions are collaborative efforts among a wide variety of local youth serving organizations who work to reduce underage drinking and substance abuse through prevention education and to bring programs that foster positive youth development.

My RAC Directors keep the coalitions informed on latest drug trends; as reported in our latest youth survey in Fairfield, only 62% of young people report that marijuana is not a perceived risky drug whereas alcohol, prescription drugs, and tobacco are all ranked in the 90 percentile as extremely risky. With the landscape around marijuana use changing, young people are being bombarded with differing (and often) confusing messaging to marijuana use. It is important that local coalitions and prevention councils stay abreast of messaging to inform parents and to keep young people safe.

Additionally, our RAC is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the Search Institute's Youth Attitudes and Behaviors Survey. The RAC is also the entity that pays not only for survey usage and licensing but also the reports that are actively used by community groups to continue to inform our work. If the RAC was not able to cover the expense of the survey, our community would not be in the capacity to do it on our own- thus leading to lack of data. This data is critical to our prevention work as it identifies our youth's strengths and areas of concern. This allows us to focus our efforts where they are most needed and to evaluate our programs and their effectiveness. Without the data we are guessing, and this is not efficient. The past survey's have provided evidence to support a social norms message that most youth are not drinking, while the most recent round of surveys have revealed a decline in perception of harm around marijuana use and a corresponding increase in usage among older youth. This highlights the need for more widespread education regarding the risks associated with marijuana use by our young people.

The RACS were also responsible for piloting the Medication Drop Box program, which resulted in Drop Boxes in 3 of the towns I represent and a collaborative print effort to generate awareness of the availability of this safe disposal option. This has reduced access to thousands of pounds of unwanted and unused drugs which may well have ended up in our water system or the hands of our youth.

For these reasons, as well as many other too numerous to recount, I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

Thank you for your attention to these important services and supports.