

**Testimony of Lawrence McHugh, Middlesex Chamber of Commerce
concerning funding for Regional Action Councils in**

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 & Addiction Services - March 6, 2015

To the Honorable Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am offering testimony in strong opposition to the proposed cuts to the Regional Action Councils. In my community, the Regional Action Council enjoys a great deal of respect. It is *the* source for substance abuse data and information. The Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council (MCSAAC) sponsors community forums, trainings, and media campaigns. MCSAAC and its sister RACs are at the forefront in battling our most recent drug scourge, prescription opiates and heroin. In partnership with our Local Prevention Councils, MCSAAC educates the public, especially youth, about the dangers of today's potent marijuana.

The business community does not want to see major funding cuts to human services. Mental illness, alcoholism, and drug abuse do not contribute to a thriving economy. Quite the opposite! We need a healthy workforce and stable families to keep Connecticut growing.

While substance abuse treatment has its place, I am particularly concerned about substance abuse *prevention*. It is far less expensive, both financially and in terms of human suffering, to prevent a disease rather than treat it. Studies show that young people who do not abuse alcohol or drugs before age 25 have a nearly zero chance of developing an addiction later in life. That is a powerful fact.

The Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council includes school staff, health providers, parents, clergy, elected officials, business people, and people in recovery. Two staff work with more than 200 volunteers in our region. They survey thousands of school children, provide workshops, participate in health fairs, sponsor community forums, launch public awareness campaigns, and keep people thinking about good health and healthy habits. In October 2015 MCSAAC will celebrate its 25th Anniversary.

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The entire statewide RAC system costs only \$1.1 million dollars. Presently, the State of Connecticut funds the RACs from the Pre-Trial Account. The governor has proposed a 79% cut. This is not tenable. RACs depend on core funding of \$1.1M in order to perform basic services and to raise private dollars for further programming.

I ask that you please restore full funding to the Regional Action Councils. Thank you.

Larry McHugh, President
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