

Testimony for Public Hearing  
Appropriations Committee  
March 6, 2015

Eileen M. Russo  
Naugatuck, CT 06770

In support of restoration of funding for all Regional Action Councils including the Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Action Council (CNVRAC).

- CNVRAC serves the towns of: *Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Cheshire, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott, Woodbury*

**Governor's H. B. No. 6924 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.**

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Rep. Dillon and Members of the Committee:

My name is Eileen Russo and I am a resident of Naugatuck. In the interest of full disclosure I serve (in a volunteer capacity) on the Steering Committee of CNVRAC, teach for Gateway Community College, and have been employed in the private non-profit sector for much of my career in addiction treatment settings.

As a Naugatuck resident and one who is interested in the future of our youth, I urge you to **OPPOSE the proposed budget cuts under the Governor's Bill No. 6824**. According to this Bill, Regional Action Councils as they currently exist, would be reduced from their current \$1.1 million budget by \$736,000. Please note that 13 Regional Action Councils serve the state and share the current 1.1 million dollar pie. A cut to the already tenuous budgets of the Regional Action Councils would result in the crippling of the substance abuse prevention infrastructure within the state as we know it. This would result not only in a loss of the services provided by the Regional Action Councils, but would essentially eliminate any potential long-term benefit to the state in later environmental, treatment, and other healthcare cost savings as well.

In light of the tragic shooting in Sandy Hook and the resulting recommendation from the Sandy Hook Commission that the state needs more early identification, prevention, and treatment efforts, it is penny wise and pound foolish to cut the limited prevention efforts that the State of Connecticut has in place. A key recommendation from the Sandy Hook Commission is widespread training in Mental Health First Aid. The proposed budget cut would essentially eliminate the ability of the Regional Action Councils to provide this training.

In addition to the reduction in services such as Mental Health First Aid, the Regional Action Councils provided much needed services at the local level. Some examples of what has been provided to Naugatuck citizens (without any financial contribution from the Borough) during the past two years alone are:

- Promotion & coordination of a comprehensive youth risk behavior and resiliency survey conducted with all students in grades 7-12 throughout Naugatuck Public Schools
- Promotion & coordination of a district-wide youth-led analysis of local-level risk and protective factors affecting adolescent substance use, education, risk of suicide, bullying, safety, and other areas affecting health and wellness of young people
- Provided Grant Application technical assistance and oversight to Naugatuck Youth Services, the designated Local Substance Abuse Prevention Council, their Board of Directors, and collaborating agencies
- Coordination and development of local-level Drug Endangered Child (DEC) Alliance between Naugatuck Police Department, Department of Children & Families, and the statewide DEC office
- Promotion & Coordination of DEC training for Naugatuck Law Enforcement, School Administration and Pupil Services Staff, area social service agencies, probation, parole, DCF Caseworkers, and other related professionals
- Coordination of permanent Medication Drop Box installation at Naugatuck Police Department; ongoing promotion of this cost-effective opioid deterrence measure
- Sub-regional and local training delivery: 40 Developmental Assets for Youth; Opioid Abuse Prevention Forum; Financial Wellness for Seniors and Problem Gambling Prevention Across the Lifespan; Local Prevention Council “101”; Local Prevention Council Capacity Building; Local Prevention Council TA: Prevention Strategies & Effective Service Delivery.

In my introduction I mentioned that I have worked in mental health/addiction treatment for much of my career. I have seen first-hand that treatment can bring miracles to the lives of those who suffer from addiction/mental health problems. However, I also know that treatment is much more expensive than prevention and without prevention or treatment, the state can look forward to incarcerating those with problems at a cost of approximately \$44,000 per inmate, per year.

In closing, I again urge you to **OPPOSE the proposed budget cuts under the Governor’s Bill No. 6824.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Eileen M. Russo,

Naugatuck Resident