

Testimony by James Fazio
On behalf of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board
Before the Appropriations Committee
IN OPPOSITION TO:
The Governor's proposed DMHAS budget cuts for fiscal year 2016-17
March 6, 2015

Good evening Senator Bye and Representative Walker and distinguished members of the appropriations committee. My name is James Fazio and I am a registered voter in the town of Windsor, Connecticut. I am here to testify on HB 1234, An Act Concerning the Governor's Budget Recommendations. I am opposed to the cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. By eliminating \$584,000 from the Regional Mental Health Boards' budget, HB 1234 would effectively cut off all, or almost all, of the funding for this needed organization. The Regional Mental Health Boards were created 40 years ago by the Connecticut legislature and are still, now more than ever, relevant today. They allow persons in recovery, family members, mental health providers, concerned citizens, town officials and social workers to meet and discuss what improvements should be made to mental health services in Connecticut. The Boards conduct needs assessments, evaluate the Behavioral Health Service System (which is mandated by State Statute 17a-483-4), provide equal representation of stakeholders, and engage and educate the community about mental health. The Regional Mental Health Boards operate on a low budget, with an average of 2 staff members and 500 volunteers state wide. An investment of \$ 584,000 helps bring in \$ 23,000,000 in federal funding for mental health and addiction services. The Regional Mental Health Boards are the community's voice and provide independent oversight of mental health services delivery.

I personally volunteer as secretary on one of the Regional Board's Catchment Area

Councils, or CAC's. I have witnessed improvements in mental health service delivery in the Local Mental Health Authorities. First, there was integration of services and easier access. Now, a holistic approach to mental health is being adopted. It is also easier for consumers of mental health services to access a dentist or medical doctor, which often requires finding one who accepts state medical insurance, since many consumers' incomes are near the poverty level. One fellow CAC member was able to help start a new bus line in her town, which allows many persons without personal transportation to get around town, buy food, or access medical services, etc. These are some examples of how the Regional Mental Health Boards directly improved the quality of life for mental health consumers as well as other town residents.

The North Central Regional Mental Health Board also provided financial support and oversight for the Day in the Life Project, a ground breaking approach to telling the stories of 80 Connecticut consumers of mental health services. Several consumers, working with a Yale professor, conducted interviews and created a presentation that was heard at CVH State Hospital and at several local colleges. A professional DVD of the presentation was also produced by a film company. Many of the persons we interviewed were grateful for our interest in their day to day struggles with mental illness and their experiences with mental health treatment providers in Connecticut. We need the Regional Mental Health Boards. I ask the appropriations committee to please not allow HB 1234 to be passed into law. I would like to thank the entire appropriations committee for hearing my testimony.