

**Testimony by Susan Huleatt
Before the Appropriations Committee
IN OPPOSITION TO:
The Governor's proposed budget cuts for fiscal year 2016-17
March 6, 2015**

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Susan Huleatt and I am writing as the Town of West Hartford Human Services Manager. I am compelled to make a statement about the value of the Regional Mental Health Board to the quality and fabric of life in West Hartford. The NCRMHB ties our communities together in advocating for, and disseminating information to/about, persons with mental health or addiction needs. The needs of town residents, especially in this population, can often remain unknown to service providers, town officials, policy makers, etc., without the coordinated and insightful efforts of the Regional Mental Health Board. The Board convenes regular meetings where consumers, providers, and other representatives can come together to learn from each other, bring awareness of programs, services, legislation and other pressing needs in an environment of mutual concern, interest and respect.

As the Town's Human Services Manager, I find the weekly "News of the Week" email is invaluable, informing our staff of the latest developments in the field and allowing us to better inform and serve town residents. Being included in the monthly meetings also provides an opportunity to get to know leaders in the consumer population who advise policy makers, bring issues to our attention, and brainstorm solutions. I have been very grateful, too, to our appointed town representative, who consults me about what this department is experiencing, any new developments to share, etc., and has

faithfully represented our town in advocating for the mental health and addiction needs of our residents.

I adamantly oppose the elimination of Regional Mental Health Boards as a cost-cutting budget measure. It is not the time, now or in the future, to curtail or eliminate such a vital voice for our most vulnerable citizens. This advocacy organization, speaking for those often disenfranchised by mental illness or addictions, needs to continue their vital work in our state.

Respectfully,

Susan Huleatt, LCSW
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