



WHEELER CLINIC
Fostering positive change.

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Wendy DeAngelo, and I am the Chief Business Development Officer of Wheeler Clinic. I would like to thank you for providing this opportunity to speak today on behalf of my colleagues and the more than 19,000 individuals we serve each year.

Wheeler provides a comprehensive continuum of mental health and substance abuse recovery, primary care, community justice, education, child welfare, early childhood and prevention and wellness services across Connecticut. The individuals and families who come to us for care include some of the most vulnerable populations in our state including individuals with serious and frequently co-occurring mental illness and addiction, co-morbid medical disorders and histories of exposure to trauma and violence. The services we provide are highly effective in helping these individuals and families function successfully in the community, diverting emergency room and inpatient hospitalizations, and reducing truancy and recidivism, but these services are also chronically underfunded.

We strongly oppose the proposed Medicaid rate reduction of \$107.5 million in FY16 and \$117.5 million in FY17, after factoring in the federal share. These reductions will have a devastating impact on more than 13,000 of the people in our care each year. Current Medicaid reimbursement rates do not cover the cost of care and Medicaid rate increases for behavioral health providers approved by the legislature in the last session have never been implemented by the Department of Social Services. With the currently proposed rate cuts and other funding cuts to grants in the adult system, Wheeler, and providers like us, can no longer afford the increasing costs of providing care and will not be able to meet the rapidly growing demand for services. **Demand for our adult outpatient services has increased by 40% in the last two years.**

This continued growth in the need for services makes it imperative that Enhanced Care Clinics (ECCs) be exempt from any Medicaid rate reduction. ECCs are required to staff to accommodate demand for therapy, psychiatric and medication management services – reducing these rates will undermine these resources and significantly reduce access to care for Medicaid recipients requiring behavioral health services.

As it currently stands, the proposed rate reductions will lead to a proportional reduction in access to critically needed, effective and cost-efficient services. We will be forced to close programs or restrict access to care, rationing care only for the most seriously ill. The loss of DMHAS grants funds combined with Medicaid rate reductions will force Wheeler to take the following actions effective July 1, 2015:

- We will have to close admissions to all uninsured individuals. In the last year we served over 500 uninsured individuals who have not enrolled in insurance despite on-site assistance at all of our outpatient locations. Some may qualify for Husky and refuse to



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enroll, others are very low income and see the insurance options as too expensive and some do not follow through with required paperwork even with assistance.

- We will provide psychiatric evaluations and medication management to *only* those individuals with the most serious need. All others requiring medication management will be referred to a primary care physician for assistance. Unfortunately, primary care is ill-prepared to manage these patients. We estimated this will impact over 300 clients.
- We will have to reduce overall access to outpatient services proportionate to the cuts and our ability to absorb them. This will impact hundreds of individuals and families in the central Connecticut and Hartford area. This will also impact children. Many of the adult clients we work with are involved in the child welfare system and are referred to Wheeler for domestic violence treatment, addiction and mental health care

We also oppose the proposed reductions in Medicaid eligibility for the 34,000 adults in the HUSKY A program who will be impacted. While these adults will be eligible to purchase insurance through the CT Health Insurance Exchange, we know that many will forego health insurance altogether, many will delay or avoid needed care to avoid out of pocket expenses and those who do seek care will not be able to make co-payments for services. This creates an additional de facto funding cut for providers like Wheeler, a cut that will further erode the safety net and reduce access to care.

Individuals and families in need of critical community based services will not simply disappear if care is no longer available. Instead, they will have to seek exponentially more expensive services in emergency departments and hospitals, or worse, seek no help at all. They may end up in jails, become homeless, or become a danger to themselves or others. The long-term costs to the state and to individuals and families are untenable.

We respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee act to prevent further reductions in Medicaid reimbursement rates and Medicaid eligibility.

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