



Helping the Children and Families of Darien, New Canaan, Norwalk, Weston, Westport, and Wilton since 1956.

**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee  
February 27, 2015  
By Mark Lilliedahl, President, Board of Trustees,  
Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield County.**

Good Evening Representative Walker, Senator Bye, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mark Lilliedahl and I am president of the Board of Trustees of the Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield County, located in Norwalk. Founded in 1956, the Child Guidance Center is a non-profit organization that helps thousands of children every year who suffer from a wide range of mental and behavioral health issues. I am here before you to testify regarding H.B. No. 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017. Specifically, I would like to address the dire need for adequate state funding of non-profit, out-patient child mental health care providers like the Child Guidance Center.

As we sit here today, 125,000 Connecticut children who suffer from disorders such as depression, chronic anxiety, mood disorders, or bi-polar disorder *are not getting the treatment they need*. That's 125,000 children – a number greater than the entire population of Hartford. To call this a crisis is not exaggeration or hyperbole.

The primary cause of this crisis is a lack of affordable treatment options for children. Private treatment can run as high as \$400 hour. Even in the wealthiest communities in our state, tens of thousands of children and families cannot afford private treatment. As a result, the Child Guidance Center is often their only hope. Our policy is to never turn a child away due to a family's inability to pay. Unfortunately, current state funding levels limit our capacity, enabling us to treat less than half the children in our area who need our help.

The harsh reality is that untreated childhood mental illness is at the heart of many of our community's most agonizing problems. Teen suicide, teen pregnancy, academic failure, school disruptions, teen incarceration, substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment, bullying, community violence, and exploding health care costs. All of these societal problems have strong links to the childhood mental health crisis. And while all of these problems warrant our attention and resources, failure to adequately fund programs that address a major underlying issue is short-sighted and ultimately, extremely costly.

The financial cost of allowing 125,000 Connecticut children with mental health disorders to go without treatment is enormous. School systems are spending millions of dollars to send troubled children to out-of-district care facilities and are redirecting scarce resources from teaching to managing students with untreated mental illnesses. Hospital emergency rooms are overloaded with patients, many uninsured, whose primary diagnosis is a mental health condition. Juvenile detention facilities are dangerously overcrowded. And the list goes on to include town budgets, police departments, social services, and Medicaid - all of which are struggling to handle the financial consequences of the children's mental health issues that we have failed to properly address.



The good news is that research consistently shows that early detection and intervention dramatically improves the long-term outlook for a child with a psychiatric disorder. Such intervention improves school attendance and academic performance, reduces the risk of incarceration, lowers teen pregnancy levels, lowers crime and substance abuse levels, and reduces the likelihood of the kind of violence that shocked all of us in Sandy Hook.

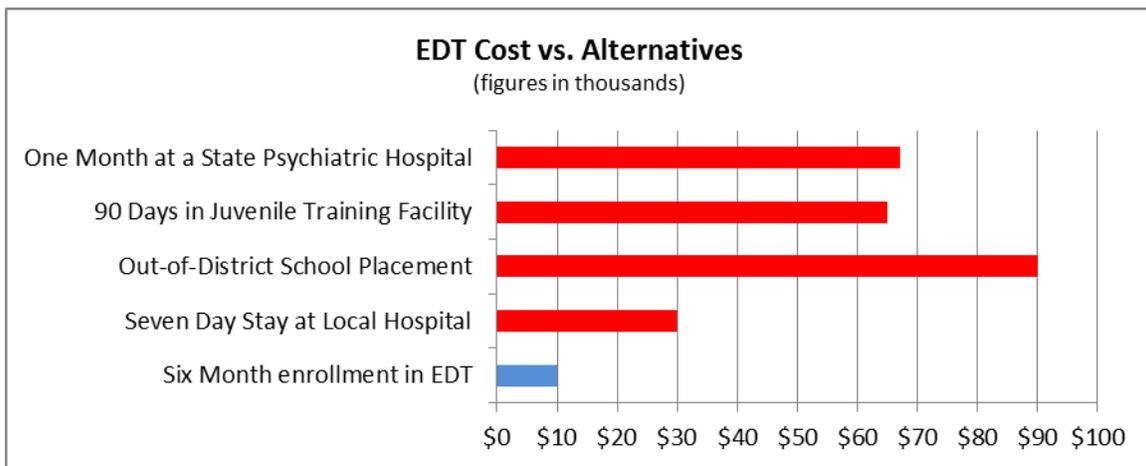
At current DCF and Medicaid funding levels, the Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield struggles to make ends meet. I want to be clear on this. If our DCF funding is cut, we may be forced to close our doors. That means the over 2,000 children we help every year from Norwalk, Westport, Weston, Darien, Wilton, and New Canaan will have nowhere to go. It will be a disaster. For the kids. For their families. For our communities.

What's frustrating for us, and what should be frustrating for you and for all Connecticut taxpayers, is that intervention ultimately saves money for everyone. In fact, it's estimated that \$10,000 spent on funding children's mental health care programs today will result in long term savings of nearly \$100,000. That's a 10 times return on investment - twice the rate of return of Apple stock over the past five years.

I'd like to give you an example:

One of the programs at the Child Guidance Center is the PROSPECTS Extended Day Treatment (EDT) program, which offers Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED) children ages 5 - 12 with in-patient level mental health care on an out-patient basis. They require intensive therapeutic treatment to remain with their families and attend mainstream schools.

For most of the children enrolled in the program, the only alternatives to treatment at EDT are out-of-district placement, home-schooling, hospitalization, residential treatment, or involvement in the juvenile justice system. Costs associated with these alternative options far exceed costs associated with early intervention programs like EDT. The average cost per child at EDT is \$10,000 for a six month course of treatment, a fraction of the estimated cost of alternative treatment options.





It is a fact that early intervention and treatment saves money and saves lives. And yet, while the proposed biennium state budget includes an overall three percent increase, it contains major cuts to child mental health services. This is alarming.

The question you should be asking yourselves isn't "how can we afford to increase funding of children's mental health services?" The question should be "are we prepared for the economic and societal costs of failing to adequately fund children's mental health services?" To cut funding will not only end up costing the state more, but will cause an extraordinary level of suffering and anguish for thousands of children and families throughout the state.

While I am here to fight to maintain our DCF funding, what we really need is an *increase* in funding. There are still thousands of children in our service area that desperately need our help. These children will remain untreated without additional support from the state. It is heartbreaking to consider the price these untreated children and their families will pay if we fail to act. For that matter, the price we will all pay.

I thank you for your time tonight and appreciate the tough job you all have ahead of you. I trust that you will make the right moral, social, and economic decision regarding adequate funding for children's mental health in the budget process. Thank you.