

**To: Members of the Appropriations Committee**

**From: Roberta J. Cook, President and CEO**

**Re: Appropriations Committee Budget Hearings: DMHAS**

**Date: March 6, 2015**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Representative Dillon, Representative Candelaria and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I thank you for your consideration of my testimony. My name is Roberta Cook and I am the President and CEO of BHcare, one of six private nonprofits in CT dedicated to serving individuals with the most serious mental illnesses.

BHcare is designated by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) as the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) for towns in Greater New Haven, the Valley and the Shoreline. Each year BHcare provides mental health treatment for more than 3,100 Connecticut residents. These individuals are struggling with chronic disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. These illnesses are pervasive and if left untreated can lead to an increase in devastating symptoms, psychiatric crises, and result in public health and safety hazards.

I am writing today in response to Governor Malloy's proposed budget – specifically, the budget for DMHAS. I am strongly opposed to the continued cuts to the grant accounts for mental health and substance abuse services. These grant accounts saw a reduction of more than \$25M in the last biennial budget. Although they appear to be funded at the same level as the FY 15 budget, this actually represents a cut as there is no indication of ongoing supplementary funding from the Tobacco Trust Fund, which totaled \$10M last year, and the Medicaid increase was not implemented.

The proposed budget will force our State's six LMHA's to nearly eliminate outpatient behavioral health services; it will obliterate our mental health system. We are just starting to feel the impact of previous cuts. We recently received a \$463,000 reduction in our DMHAS grant funding forcing us to cut four staff positions and eliminate services for 320 clients. If the cuts remain for FY 16-17, we will have to cut 40 staff positions and refuse treatment for 1,700 adults with serious mental illness.

This budget will leave thousands of our most seriously ill without proper medication and treatment. It will drive the State into a mental health emergency- one that will cost significantly more than the outpatient services previously funded by grant dollars. Without accessible outpatient mental health services the State will see a sharp increase in the number of people accessing acute care and/or ending up in correctional facilities.

If nothing is done to restore DMHAS grant funding, it will result in crisis, in loss, and in a significant financial and tragic burden for Connecticut. My request to you is simple, restore DMHAS grant funding for outpatient behavioral health services.