

**TESTIMONY OF
KAREN EISENHAUER
DIRECTOR OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
BRISTOL HOSPITAL
SUBMITTED TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Friday, March 6, 2015**

**HB 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending
June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other
Provisions Related To Revenue**

My name is Karen Eisenhauer, and I am Director of Behavioral Health at Bristol Hospital. I'd like to focus my comments specifically on behavioral health services provided by our state hospitals. Behavioral health encompasses a wide range of needs, including substance abuse and addiction, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and many other types of mental illnesses.

The Affordable Care Act will help more people get healthcare, and this includes treatment for behavioral health disorders. In the next year or two, an estimated additional two million previously uninsured adults are expected to receive behavioral health services under the Affordable Care Act.

Hospitals throughout the nation, including our excellent hospitals here in Connecticut, must be ready for this. Many of those who are receiving coverage for the first time are in need and hurting. They may be struggling with issues that can be treated readily, and the results can be life-changing. We have the medical knowledge, expertise, and determination to care for these patients. But what's in jeopardy is adequate funding to meet these needs.

In the last fiscal year, 32% of the substance abuse patients seen at Bristol Hospital were treated on our behavioral health unit; the state average is 11%. When we consider payer mix, our inpatient behavioral health unit has seen a rise of 10%, primarily due to the ACA, and this represents 49% of our inpatients. But with the proposed elimination of \$20 million in state funds for mental health and substance abuse treatment, these patients may not be able to receive treatment.

This is a heartbreaking thought to us as caregivers. I have seen firsthand the difference we have made in the lives of people struggling with behavioral health

challenges. We work hard to provide the highest quality care possible to these often-fragile patients, and we need to preserve the resources to continue to do so.

I'm asking that as you consider the budget, you keep hospital funding as a top priority, for the good of all patients. Thank you for considering my testimony.