

**Testimony of William B. Melanson, CT DOC Lieutenant (Retired)-CT Army National Guard 1SG (Retired)-Executive Board Member Serac
concerning funding for Regional Action Councils in**

H.B. No. 6824 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE

Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services - March 6, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations subcommittee, my name is William B. Melanson. I am offering testimony in strong opposition to the proposed cuts to the regional action councils.

At the risk of sounding melodramatic, I believe this funding cut will cost lives. The Southeastern Regional Council served 20 host towns in a multitude of ways, ranging from youth services, youth leadership programs, suicide prevention, drug awareness and prevention, anti-bullying, school climate surveys, and a host of support services that are catered to the individual needs of each town.

After retiring from the Department of Correction, I was asked to assume a full time assignment for the CT ARNG Counter Drug Unit, and was assigned to SERAC. After working there for a short time, I came to realize that they are indeed the best kept secret and force for good the State has on their side. The Executive Director Michele Devine and her staff are driven and passionate about providing assistance, and making a difference for every member town. There was never a request denied, and often new lesson plans were written and training delivered on a moment's notice to address local problems.

I understand the climate of fiscal austerity, and your dilemma; but I have seen firsthand how these programs educate people, and change lives. I also know it is difficult to quantify prevention in fiscal terms, but what is the price tag on a life? Our state has more than doubled overdosed deaths in the last few years, and our suicide rate has also risen dramatically. Our youth are troubled at an unprecedented rate, and SERAC is the antidote. I promise you the return on investment will be worth far more than any line on a budget form.

I urge you to strongly consider not only restoring the amount cut for the RAC's, but increase it. The symbiotic partnerships between highly motivated and dedicated personnel in the RAC's and the host towns is unlike anything I have witnessed over two, 20 plus year careers. I know in my heart this money will go directly, and efficiently, to the constituents that need it. I have no doubt that approval of this funding restoration will save, and change, lives; forever.

Sincerely,

William B. Melanson