

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget

Public Hearing Date: March 6, 2015

Ellen Brezovsky, LCSW New Canaan, CT

Re: Proposed cuts to Regional Action Councils

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Ellen Brezovsky and I am writing in opposition to the proposed cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. **In particular, I urge you to continue funding the Regional Action Councils (RACs)**

The proposed cut would effectively close down the entire RAC system. This would mean an end to grassroots needs assessment, community-based evaluations, regional coalition building, and representation of the community's voice at the state level.

As a member of Communities 4 Action (the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council) and MFSAC (MidFairfield Substance Abuse Council), I have seen the great value provided by the RAC system.

The RACs provide outreach and education on substance abuse prevention, bring together a wide range of community members and organizations, and bring our region's needs straight to the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services. It is the only organization representing consumers, family members, and providers of addiction services. We cannot afford to eliminate these vital functions.

Furthermore, if the RACs are eliminated, the state risks losing \$23,000,000 in federal funding, since the mental health and substance abuse block grants depend on the regional information collected by the RMHBs and the Regional Action Councils and on their participation in the State Planning Council.

On a local level, with only one full-time staff member, Communities 4 Action and MFSAC work tirelessly to connect people and programs in order to meet needs and improve services.

Silver Hill Hospital has collaborated with the RACs on various community projects to raise awareness about substance abuse issues. Specifically in the past year both of our addiction psychiatrists, Dr. Eric Collins, Physician-in-Chief at Silver Hill and Dr. John Douglas, Director of our Outpatient Opioid Addiction Program, have spoken to various community agencies on the dangers of Marijuana use on teenage brain development, Nalaxone use to prevent Opioid Overdose, and the dangers of Prescription Drug Abuse among other addiction issues. It is because of our relationship with our local RAC, Communities 4 Action that we were able to provide this important lifesaving information to the community. Without the infrastructure that the RACs provide, we would lose the opportunity to reach out to many community organizations and our ability to share our expert staff would be much more limited. The RACs also provide an abundance of educational and referral information for both substance abuse prevention and support for those in the recovery community.

As we have seen in various news reports recently, [Heroin-Related Deaths Have Quadrupled in America | TIME](#), Heroin is becoming an ever increasing problem for many in the United States and CT is no exception. The RACs help to highlight these problems and provide forums for community members to discuss these issues and focus on solutions. Without their leadership we would be left with a huge gap in awareness and collaborative problem solving.

Thank you for understanding the value of these critical functions in support of the substance abuse prevention and recovery initiatives.

Ellen Brezovsky, LCSW

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Silver Hill Hospital

208 Valley Road

New Canaan, CT 06840