

**Testimony of Patricia Charles, Ph.D, Superintendent, Middletown Schools  
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*

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon,  
and Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Dr. Patricia Charles, Superintendent of the Middletown, Connecticut public school  
system. I am offering testimony in strong opposition to the proposed cuts to the Regional  
Action Councils.

Nearly every person suffering from alcoholism and drug addiction entered the path of abuse in  
their teenage years – sometimes as young as ten years old. *Students in middle schools and high  
schools are our most vulnerable population.* For this reason the State of Connecticut mandates  
that health teachers in the middle schools discuss the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and  
marijuana use with their students.

However, a few hours of middle school lessons is not anywhere near enough. Prevention and  
early intervention is the job of the whole community. That is where the Regional Action  
Councils come in. RACs pull school administrators, business owners, politicians, parents,  
religious leaders, law enforcement personnel and many more people together. And together,  
we learn about the drugs in our community and the best strategies to combat them.

Let me give you one example. My RAC, the Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council,  
developed a silent 30-second PSA that runs at our Department of Motor Vehicles office. The  
DMV is one place where nearly all parents wind up with their teens.

The ad begins with the words, "When should a parent intervene?" We see a boy looking into a  
medicine cabinet with the word, "Wondering." The following image is an older teenage boy  
taking out a prescription bottle, with the word "Experimenting." Finally, we see a young man  
lying strung-out on his bed, with the word "Addicted." When *should* a parent intervene?

Getting such messages into the public consciousness – along with resources for taking  
preemptive action – is the job of the Regional Action Councils. My own RAC keeps us updated  
on trends in alcohol, marijuana and prescription drug abuse; they mount public campaigns  
against underage drinking and opiate abuse; they host community forums and trainings, and  
strategize with law enforcement. In recent years, MCSAAC has raised additional funds in order  
to offer direct services: alcohol and personal relationships for young adults, tobacco cessation  
groups, e-cigarette counter-marketing, and the neurobiology of addiction for health

professionals. The RACs are very small. MCSAAC, for example, employs one full- and one part-time person. But they make a small amount of funding go a *very* long way.

Substance abuse is of great concern for parents and educators. I expelled three Middletown students this month for distribution at school. One student I met with described “weed” as the only thing he can focus on – his next opportunity to get high. The administrators talk about the incredible strength of the marijuana they are intercepting and the recent tragedy at Wesleyan with students using the “party drug” Molly, a refined and more powerful form of Ecstasy (MDMA) point to a need to increase our drug education efforts, not reduce them.

The entire statewide RAC system costs only \$1.1 million dollars. The State of Connecticut funds the RACs from the Pre-Trial Account. It is irresponsible to cut that funding nearly 80%, as the governor has proposed. Without core funding, RACs will lose their stability and the capacity to raise additional money for community prevention work. Please restore the \$1.1 million dollar core funding to the statewide Regional Action Council system. Thank you.