

Testimony of Marjorie Blizard
In Support of Regional Mental Health Board Funding
Before the Appropriations Committee
March 6, 2015

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Marjorie Blizard, and I am a registered voter in Norwich. I oppose the elimination of funding for the Regional Mental Health Boards, which are a vital element in saving taxpayer dollars. They offer the most direct form of accountability and oversight – the input of those who use and provide the services. Their monthly Catchment Area Council meetings gather information from consumers and providers, and report back to DMHAS.

This valuable service more than pays for itself in savings to the state. The RMHBs use only one or two paid staff in each region to organize hundreds of volunteers, who among them provide oversight and accountability to dozens of organizations. The very modest cost of this efficient operation prevents problems that could cost far more than the budget of the RMHBs.

About two years ago, a major regional mental health provider, Sound Community Services, was found to be mispending hundreds of thousands of dollars, while cutting services to the consumers who relied on on the organization for care. The problem was first identified and reported by the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, which then assisted with the state investigation and the process of installing new management. The misspent funds alone came to more than double the annual budget of the ERMHB. If the problem had not been caught early by the ERMHB, the financial losses might have been much more, and the costs of untreated mental illness would be incalculable.

My late husband, Robert E. Davidson, was the Executive Director of the ERMHB who was instrumental in first reporting the concerns with Sound Community Services, and collaborating with the appropriate agencies in resolving the problem.

The RMHBs would be a cost effective use of funds even if they only provided accountability, but in fact they provide many other services to individuals, organizations and the state, and bring in millions in grant funding, for a very modest cost. Cutting this small amount of funding from the budget would result in much greater costs to provide similar services through other organizations. It would be even more costly to fail to provide these services. Please save taxpayers those expenses by continuing to fund the Regional Mental Health Boards at their current levels.

Thank you.