

Testimony presented by Marcia DuFore

On behalf of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board

Before the Finance Committee

April 23, 2015

IN SUPPORT OF:

S.B. No. 1135: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FOR MAINTAINING THE BUDGET RESERVE FUND AND REDUCING THE EFFECT OF REVENUE VOLATILITY ON THE STATE BUDGET

Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger and distinguished members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Marcia DuFore. I am writing to you as Executive Director of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board (NCRMHB). I am here today to testify in support of SB 1135 which seeks to reduce the effect of revenue volatility on our state's budget. We support this effort as well as any and all revenue options that will help us avoid harmful cuts to essential health and human services.

Our Board's responsibility is to study the mental health needs of people in our region and assist the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) with setting priorities for services to meet those needs. Our constituents include people who use mental health and addiction services, their families and concerned citizens in the towns and cities where services are delivered. Many of our constituents live in poverty will be severely impacted by the proposed budget that would cut spending in every area of health and human service available to them. Just a few that will have such a critical impact are:

- \$107 million cut to Medicaid rates
- \$25 million cut to outpatient mental health and addiction services
- Elimination of the Statewide Gatekeeper program that provides outreach to older adults with mental health and addiction concerns
- Elimination of Connecticut Legal Right funding for housing advocacy
- Virtual elimination of Regional Mental Health Boards and their evaluation and needs assessment findings that leverage \$23 million in federal funding for mental health and addiction services

We understand that these a difficult economic times and that raising revenue or addressing the spending cap are unpopular issues. However it is during these difficult and uncertain times that individuals and families are in greatest need of a safety net. Implementing these proposed cuts in lieu of finding ways to raise revenue is shortsighted and unacceptable from and economic and human perspective.

Members of our Board are currently evaluating the crisis response system in our region along with access to services and supports for continuity of care post crisis. It is disheartening to see how often our system relies on emergency responders and expensive hospital emergency care as the primary point of access (and often the only source of care) for mental health and addiction issues. As detailed in the Final Report of the Governor's Sandy Hook Advisory

Commission, our community mental health system is underfunded and desperately inadequate to serve the individuals and families who need it. The stability of our service system and the real human lives of many of our constituents and yours are on the line.

Again we support your efforts to reduce the volatility of our state budget and ask you to support any and all revenue and budget options that preserve critical safety net services.

Thank you for your time, attention, and interest in these matters,

Sincerely,

Marcia DuFore, Executive Director
North Central Regional Mental Health Board