



Advocacy and Action for
Connecticut's Mental Health

**Testimony of the Keep the Promise Coalition Children's Committee
Before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
April 23, 2015**

IN REGARDS TO

SB 1135 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FOR MAINTAINING THE BUDGET RESERVE FUND AND REDUCING THE EFFECT OF REVENUE VOLATILITY ON THE STATE BUDGET.

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, my name is Susan Kelley and I am the Child and Adolescent Policy Manager for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut, and staff to the Keep the Promise Coalition. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions, and the fiduciary of KTP. KTP is the largest group of stakeholders with a united voice on mental health issues in Connecticut. I am addressing you today on behalf of KTP's Children's Committee concerning ***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.***

S.B. 1135 seeks to reduce the effects of revenue volatility on our state's budget. We support this effort, and are also in favor of exploring and committing to higher revenue in the upcoming fiscal year to avoid harmful and detrimental cuts to crucial public services.

The proposed cuts are deep. The Governor's budget cuts nearly \$600 million from programs critical to individuals, children and families across the state, including the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Social Services and Developmental Disabilities, Education, Higher Education and Office of Early Childhood.

The cuts are unfair as they are disproportionately and negatively impact our most vulnerable citizens, including children, families, and individuals with disabilities and complex health needs. **The cuts are shortsighted.** For example, cutting effective and cost-effective services and supports that benefit our citizens and keep them from higher need services such as institutional care and support them to gain or maintain stability in the community, or failing to invest in our best resource, our children, means we will pay a lot more in the long run.

In order to avoid the harmful effect of these cuts, *particularly the cuts related to mental health services*, we ask the committee to raise revenue. Without funding for crucial services, children and families won't be able to get the treatment they need *today*, before problems escalate and lead to more expensive interventions such as emergency room visits and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Cutting costs for services won't make the mental health problems of children go away. Increasing revenue is the better choice and less harmful to kids.

We need revenue to support funding of children's mental health services that was made a state top priority after the Sandy Hook tragedy. The Sandy Hook Commission released its report (Sandy Hook Report) this year recommending critical improvements for achieving better mental health for our children. Similarly, by state mandate, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) released its comprehensive statewide Children's Behavioral Health Plan (Children's Plan) in October 2014 which is now in the implementation phase. The Plan calls for, among other things, locating and increasing mental health services in schools and school based mental health centers (SBHCs).

The KTP Children's Committee supports the state taking steps to ensure that services to children and families are not slashed and, further, that the recommendations in the Sandy Hook Report and the Children's Plan are given the financial backing that is necessary to improve access to quality mental health services for children and families. This commitment cannot be carried out, and harm to children avoided as the result of cuts in services, without raising revenue and making better choices in seeking to balance the current budget.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Susan R. Kelley, JD
Child and Adolescent Policy Manager
NAMI Connecticut; staff to Keep the Promise Coalition