

Written Testimony before the Appropriations Committee, re: DMHAS

My greetings to the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Matthew Sheehan and I live in Glastonbury, and I am forwarding this for your consideration.

I understand that the state of Connecticut is facing a considerable deficit, which cannot be solved without budget cuts. I also understand the importance of balancing the state budget and upholding financial practices that affect the state's credit ratings. However, cutting the "safety net" cannot be the solution toward addressing these challenges.

I am especially concerned with, and greatly opposed to, the Governor's proposal to cut mental health and substance abuse treatment grants to non-profit community providers by \$15.8 million. In the past, the legislature has thankfully made much smaller cuts to this necessary funding. But these providers are being forced to accommodate increasing demands with fewer allocations. Existing funding has been relatively sustainable, as the providers have worked hard to spend these dollars as efficiently as possible, but they cannot bear any further reductions. The governor's claim that the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid can handle this has been repeatedly proven incorrect by both DMHAS and these providers.

I strongly encourage you to consider these challenges from a long-term and big-picture perspective. First, services for persons with mental health challenges and related disabilities are not just a moral implication, but a fiscally responsible consideration. Helping more people to be able to live a "typical," productive life is a sound investment, as the safety net will be needed for fewer individuals. When people at risk are receiving these services, dollars are saved which would instead be going to jails and hospitals. These are grossly inappropriate answers, and will also cost more money in the long run. As the state's fiscal issues are projected to continually escalate over time, I hope that you will understand these implications.

Additionally, I ask you to take a good, hard look at each of the other cuts proposed to the DMHAS budget, particularly those in which would save the state money over the long term or result in forgoing outside funds which also help alleviate fiscal burdens. Instead, this is the perfect time to find ways to reduce costs and expenses which are not penny-wise and pound-foolish. For example, closing the Southbury Training School is an overdue step. I understand that it may not be immediately feasible, and not a solution to this year's budget issues. However, it will be helpful for upcoming fiscal challenges, improving the residents' quality of life, and increase resources for those with current unmet needs. In the meantime, reducing overtime costs at Southbury ought to bring forward considerable savings without resulting in harm to its residents.

I greatly appreciate that you have been committed toward protecting our safety net, and I hope for the same this year. Also, I hope that this is the right time for a discussion on how funds can be spent more efficiently, to serve more people and to do so effectively. The grants for non-profit community providers are a model example of exemplary, cost-effective services, and they must not face funding cuts for this year. Thank you.