

**Testimony of Jo Hawke, Executive Director of FAVOR before the Appropriations Committee
February 11, 2016**

**Department of Children and Families budget cuts and changes
in Governor's proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments FY2017**

Good evening. My name is Jo Hawke. I am the Executive Director of FAVOR, Inc. With a small staff of passionate people who have children with medical and behavior health challenges, we help other families throughout CT learn to navigate service delivery systems so that they can access the mental health services that their children need and promote the growth of systems of care that are responsive to the family voice.

On behalf of our families, I want to thank you for your continued support and commitment. We realize that balancing the budget in these hard times is a daunting task. We appreciate your efforts to find fair, balanced solutions to our state's fiscal problems.

When families come to FAVOR, they are typically in crisis. They are struggling to find and access services that their children need through schools and other service providers. They want to keep the children home and help them achieve safe, healthy, and happy lives. They often face barriers. Their families have multiple service needs, including children's mental health issues, poverty, homeless, and caregivers with chronic medical and mental health conditions. ***Our families depend on services that state agencies fund.***

Our families are among the neediest in the state. While we applaud efforts to move children and youths out of congregate care situations and back to their families and communities, we need *reinvestment in quality evidence-based mental health services and supports in our communities* e.g., family peer support and trauma-sensitive approaches. Our families need easily accessible services for our children e.g., services that are integrated into schools and primary care. We need a continuum of care that includes options for children that truly need residential care and transition services. ***Current funding levels are not sufficient to meet demand; further cuts would be devastating***— increasing waiting times, delaying positive outcomes for families and children that result when they receive quality services, and stalling workforce development efforts that will result in better services.

With funding from the Department of Children and Families, FAVOR is able to provide free services that would otherwise cost the family thousands of dollars and are not insurance reimbursable. Our Medical Home program which funded by the Department of Public Health provides funds for prescription drugs, durable goods, and respite that are not covered by insurance or other programs. Our families do not have other alternatives for these services. ***Over the last year, these programs have sustained multiple budget cuts in the face of increasing demand for services.*** Although we have implemented strategies to improve our ability to serve families and reduce waiting times, budget cuts have stretched our capacity to the limit.

Governor has proposed cutting over \$400 million from services that provide critical health and human services to our families. ***For each of these families, the proposed budget cuts in human services will result in loss of, not one, but multiple services that are critical for the well-being of their children.*** For this reason, I urge you to find solutions that put families first.

The consolidation of agency operating funds and proposed 5.75% across-the-board cut will make the process less transparent and promotes decision-making in siloes. This is counter to current initiatives to integrate mental health services across child serving agencies. We would encourage policy makers to push forward efforts to find cost efficiencies through shared agency responsibility and shared funding that would foster for a continuum of services accessible through all child-serving systems.

Thank you again for your support.