

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut  
Before the Appropriations Committee  
February 11, 2016**

**Department of Social Services (DSS) budget cuts and changes  
in Governor's proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments FY2017  
H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE  
FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. 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. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for individuals' and families' quality of life in the community. I am here today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to express concerns about and comment on proposed midterm budget adjustments for FY2017 as it relates to the Department of Social Services (DSS).

We understand the fiscal crisis Connecticut finds itself in and that hard decisions will need to be made by legislators. At the same time, I want to share my deep concern about the large volume of and impact of proposed cuts on human and social services, especially as they impact individuals who live with mental health and substance use conditions and utilize some of these services.

As I am sure you are well aware, the proposed budget includes multiple cuts to DSS including the annualization of last year's deficit mitigation cuts, plus a cut of 5.75% across over a dozen line items which have been proposed to be collapsed into one big budget line item. These total proposed cuts *just* within DSS of close to 62 million dollars are concerning in their own right.

In addition this year, the proposal to roll many different budget line items into one big one is as much of a concern to the public and advocates, as the known specific cuts. In the case of DSS, the to-be-collapsed line items are as disparate as Personal Services, Safety Net Services, CT Children's Medical Center and Domestic Violence Shelters. This process makes it impossible for CT residents and constituents to understand funding proposals, including cost-cutting proposals, as we do not know what particular programs services or supports are on the chopping block and by how much their funding is proposed to be cut. It turns the Appropriations public hearings into more of a scenario of general philosophical statements and a game of blind mice.

Another concern is the proposal to make funding for the rent rebate program "within available appropriations," meaning that in tight budget years, it might not be funded and rent rebates for the elderly and people with disabilities would not be available, jeopardizing individuals' stability to be able to live in the community.

We are also concerned and opposed to the proposal to repeal the statutory provision which requires Medicaid waivers, or amendments to waivers, to go through a legislative review process, with a hearing before the committees of cognizance (Appropriations and Human Services) and with the committees having power to reject a waiver or waiver amendment, as provided in Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 17b-8. (The repeal proposal can be found in section 32 of the Governor's bill S 17 – An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services.) This is an important check and protection for individuals with whom we work.

There is a policy part of the proposal, which we support. It is the creation of an Intellectual Disabilities Partnership, with a similar model to the Behavioral Health Partnership (BHP). The BHP is a partnership between relevant state agencies, the administrative services organization (Beacon Health Options) and a legislatively mandated oversight council which also includes individuals using services and advocates. The purpose of that partnership is to “[...] provide access to a more complete, coordinated, and effective system of community based behavioral health services and support [...]”. Such partnership could create positive change for individuals receiving services for developmental/intellectual challenges, given adequate funding for such services via Medicaid rates etc. and inclusion of relevant stakeholders in the planning and implementation process.

We urge you to protect the health and wellbeing of our CT residents by supporting essential and core services and supports.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Daniela Giordano, MSW  
*Public Policy Director*  
NAMI Connecticut