

**TESTIMONY OF
LAWRENCE + MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 11, 2016**

HB 5044, An Act Making Adjustments To State Expenditures For The Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the Appropriations Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening. My name is Ron Kersey and I am the Coordinator of Emergency Medical Services at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London.

We've been reading, hearing and viewing in the media recently a lot of coverage of the heroin epidemic here that is worsening by the day. It is a perfect storm and a bad one – like we've never seen before: heroin has never been so cheap, never been so potent and never been so available. Nor has it ever been so dangerous.

As a result, people are overdosing and dying in unprecedented numbers. In all of 2014, we treated 74 overdose patients. In 2015, we treated about 100. In the past two weeks alone, we've already treated more than two dozen overdose patients; several of them died.

Yes, some of them fit the stereotype of substance abusers in urban settings. However, just as many patients – if not more – are from the suburbs and even rural areas. Heroin doesn't discriminate: it kills white people, black people, Hispanics and Asians; those who live in nice homes and those who are homeless. Most are young to middle age, but they are blue-collar, white-collar and unemployed. And the crisis is spreading so fast that first responders can't keep up with it. That's why it is so disconcerting for me to have to be here this evening.

This epidemic isn't a secret. People all over the state – hopefully, including all of you in the legislature and in the governor's office – are at least aware there is a serious problem with heroin.

Congressman Courtney does. On Tuesday, he's bringing the Director of Drug Control Policy to L+M from the White House for another meeting. Our message to them will be the same as it is to you: we can't attack this problem, let alone solve it, without adequate resources.

That's why I and many of my colleagues were shocked when Gov. Malloy's proposed budget for the coming year included more funding cuts for Connecticut's hospitals – this time more than \$90 million statewide, including a \$5 million hit for my own hospital.

Our paramedic team responds to about 11,000 calls each year. That's a number that has doubled in the past 10 years, and the calls go far beyond drug overdoses. We respond to traffic accidents and crime scenes and any number of medical emergencies associated with illness.

Our service is a microcosm of the hospital itself. We must be adequately staffed and adequately equipped to care adequately for our patients. To do that, we must be adequately funded.

That's why I am here this evening – to respectfully urge you in this session to restore the funding that Gov. Malloy proposes to cut. In some cases, I can assure you that this will spell the difference between life and death. Thank you.

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