



Advocacy and Action  
for Connecticut's  
Mental Health

## REGION II REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH BOARD, INC.

*February 11, 2016*

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*Co-chair of Keep the Promise (KTP) Coalition*

### **Testimony before the Appropriations Committee Human Services sub-committee on H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.**

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kristie Barber and I a committed voter.

I am testifying in Opposition to:

- Restructuring the DSS and DCF Budgets into 1 line item
- Proposal to eliminate legislative Committee Review of Medicaid Waivers
- Proposal to Eliminate DORS Centers for Independent Living
- The removal of the \$15.00 cap on prescription co-pays that was instituted as of July 1, 2015 affecting people who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid
- Restructuring Rent Rebate to be “within available appropriations”
- \*\*DSS Six Month Redetermination Criteria for Medicaid Benefits – I PROPOSE a one year timeframe for Redeterminations for Medicaid Benefits

We are in a time where we have to connect our hearts and head, our compassion to do the right thing and our intelligence to bring Connecticut back to fiscal stability.

As a Director of one of the five Regional Mental Health Boards slated to consolidate with the Regional Action Councils, but effectively eliminated because of insufficient funds. Although I am concerned about the board staff and volunteers, the scope of these fiscal reductions will void the legislative mandate instituted 40 years ago to assure local citizen involvement in the development of Connecticut's mental health system.

Community Integration utilizing core services is a cornerstone of the Keep the Promise message and mission of helping persons with mental health and substance use challenges be able to live independently, be well supported, provide valuable input into the service system and be champions for others to do so.

Governor Malloy's proposed method to balance the budget is unprecedented. I understand the concept behind the decision to leave the flexibility to the Commissioners' of the respective Departments to make the 5.75% reductions. However, it eliminates transparency for the public and

takes away the opportunity for the legislature to do its due diligence and hear the public's remarks on the specified reductions. In addition, I have spoken with people who have been around the State budget process for ten, twenty and thirty years and they are shocked at the level of reductions in this FY 17 budget. I must say the mental health system is already lean and cannot serve people timely as it is and these vast reductions will close services yet the service need will increase exponentially.

The areas that are slated to be reduced in DSS by \$18.6 million are very concerning: Safety New Services, Emergency Services, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Domestic Violence Shelters and Services for persons with Disabilities. These services are vital to person's stability and emergent needs.

I have recommended previously to this committee and DSS to enact a one year redetermination process for Medicaid eligibility which will save money. Six months is too short a timeframe and lends it to being inefficient, people get threatening letters of termination or are terminated from benefits even though they had taken all the necessary steps to complete their forms and the system is bogged down. A Logisticare (the transportation company for DSS) management representative presented recently to KTP and said in another state where he worked eligibility requirements were processed yearly and it was much more efficient and frankly user friendly.

The proposal to eliminate the legislative committee review of the Medicaid waivers prior to the submission to the federal Medicaid agency, CMS, will take away protection and oversight for Medicaid recipients. It would remove the long-standing effective role of this committee and the Human Services Committee to ensure that a waiver or waiver amendment is in the public interest. It has been a successful review process; I urge you to keep it.

Medicare and Medicaid eligible persons who had the protection of a \$15 co-pay limit have lost that benefit as of July 1, 2015. People who are on multiple prescriptions are paying significantly more for their medications. A \$15 cap is essential for persons on a fixed income who need this benefit. If any of you have paid a co-pay for a prescription, multiply that co-pay by 5, 6 or more times. It is absolutely cost prohibitive to have monthly co-pays with no limit.

We are concerned about reductions to the Rent Rebate Program. It will be basically eliminated because it will be funded "within available appropriations" and during these fiscal times that will not be possible.

In addition, the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are proposed to be eliminated from the Department of Rehabilitation Services' (DORS) budget. Eliminating these centers will result in the loss of Federal Matching Dollars and elimination of vital services. We are concerned that it will likely increase in more costly institutional placements for people with disabilities of all ages, and loss of jobs for people with disabilities.

The proposed consolidation of the DCF funds into one line item and the proposed \$27.8 million reduction to the service system is alarming. The cuts would impact the Psychiatric Consultation services, Family Support Service, Homeless Youth, Juvenile Justice Services, Supportive Housing and the list goes on. I believe that these core services can and should be developed and protected collaboratively between the legislature, the community voice, the providers and DCF. That is the only way an informed and successful process will be designed.

The successes that I have seen as a champion for people with mental health and substance use conditions, treatment and recovery over the past six years are when collaboration is the central process. If you asked any employee of the state, or one of the private non profit providers and the people who are served by such entities what is critical to support and where there could be cost savings because of redundancies or streamlining of services, etc. you would get the best collective answer. I have seen the power of listening to all the players involved in my career in the private and public sector. I urge you lead with your heart and think with you head about the best way to really bring Connecticut's Budget under control and then and only then will you get the best solution to our fiscal problems. I am saying that negotiation is necessary and it needs to be done expediently and thoughtfully. We can do this together, not separately.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristie Barber