

Appropriations Committee Hearing - February 18, 2016

**Testimony AGAINST House Bill No. 5044, AN ACT MAKING
ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for allowing me to speak tonight. My name is Jay Valentin, I work at DMHAS' Blue Hills Hospital in Hartford, and I have been working as a mental health and addiction professional for over 25 years. I have a few points to make tonight that I hope will get you to think twice about the proposed cuts.

We have a heroin epidemic in the state of Connecticut, claiming the lives of many young people. Our sons and daughters are dying of opiate overdoses because there's not enough places to get treatment. We are already operating with a diminished capacity to adequately treat addicts and the mentally ill. Folks with severe psychiatric conditions are roaming the streets, sleeping in shelters, not being able to see psychiatrist for long periods of time, stopping their medications, and ultimately ending up in our emergency rooms. So I ask: what's more costly -- a visit to a psychiatrist, or 3-4 nights in an emergency room?

The cuts being proposed will be catastrophic. Crime will increase a great deal because that is how addicts survive. We don't need to criminalize mental illness and addiction, we need to treat it. By the way, the state is not going to save any money with these cuts because the money can go into two places: the prisons, which I believe the cost is \$23-25,000 a year per inmate, or you put it to a services. Either way the money will be spent. So why not spend it in services where there is a chance to rehabilitate someone, rather than locking them up like animals because they have an illness. In my years as the clinician, I've seen many successes and

people become productive members of society they just need a break. In fact I'm going to share this with you, I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for services I received when I needed a helping hand and this is why I feel so strongly about care for those who desperately needed. Now I am a strong contributor to my community and state.

Lastly, what is it going to take for folks to realize how critical having treatment facilities available for folks is? In our facility, we hear how families are torn apart when there's an overdose in a family or they don't know what to do with a mentally ill child or adult. I urge you to reconsider these cuts. Treatment works, not prison. In fact you know this too and because there are initiatives to reduce incarceration and have police officers bring people to facilities when they're caught with drugs on them or highly intoxicated. These are great changes, but they require more funds, not less. I urge you to help make our communities stronger not weaker and do not support Bill No. 5044. Thank you