

Testimony before the State of Connecticut Appropriations Committee

February 18th, 2016

Good evening, Senator Bye and Representative Walker, & esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Thomas Burr, from Glastonbury, CT. I am a current Board Officer and past president of the nonprofit Manchester Affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I am also the parent of an adult child who is in recovery from bipolar disorder, after 8 years' worth of repeated hospitalizations, incarcerations, and homelessness. Currently he is living on his own; he is in recovery, working full time, and doing very well. Some of the best care he received during his illness occurred right here in Hartford, at the Capital Region Mental Health Center.

You need to know that about 1 in 5 youth and adults in the United States will experience mental health conditions in any given year. These conditions can impact quality of life in numerous ways, including relationships with friends and families and participation in one's community, education and work.

I am here today to speak in opposition to the proposed cuts to our Mental Health safety net. I have attached to my testimony the NAMI Connecticut Legislative Priorities, which outline areas which where we should be making INVESTMENTS, not CUTS.

As you no doubt aware, cuts which were part of previous deficit mitigation deals, are now proposed to be annualized and include crucial core services such as housing supports and services, young adult services, discharge and diversion services, home and community based services and employment opportunities.

Newly proposed specific cuts impact essential areas such as:

- Mental Health and Substance Use Grants
- Community Care Teams
- Consolidating Mental Health Boards and Regional Action Councils
- School Based Health Centers (SBHC's)

Our NAMI Manchester Affiliate strongly opposes any cuts to the safety net in regards to mental health and behavioral health services and supports. We CLEARLY should be investing MORE into our states Mental Health System, and not LESS.

Please be aware that adding additional barriers to supporting people to live in the community with relevant services and supports will not address our citizen's needs AND make budget issues worse, by adding over a \$1,000 PER day PER person to the state's expenses*; as people with mental health challenges who cannot access care in their communities will often wind up using expensive crisis-based services, such as the ER, inpatient psychiatric hospitals; or worse, ending up in our jails and/or prisons.

IN SUMMARY: Cutting these core services and supports is bad policy for our citizens, AND bad policy for our budget, so I urge you to protect the health and wellbeing of our Connecticut residents by supporting these essential and core services and supports. Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, and People Recover. My son is just one of countless examples of people who have recovered, and who are now leading meaningful lives, working, and paying taxes!

Thank you. I will now gladly answer any questions you have.

Respectfully submitted,

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Enclosed:
NAMI Connecticut 2016 Legislative Priorities

* Typical per diem costs for ER (\$2,152), inpatient psychiatric (\$1,157), or hospitalization (\$1,089) costs; data courtesy of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project.