

Written Testimony for the
Appropriations Committee of Connecticut Mental Health Center February 18th, 2016

Luis Añez, Psy.D.
Director, Hispanic Services, CMHC.
Associate Professor, Yale University School of Medicine

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer my views about HB 5044, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

Last year I had the privilege and opportunity to serve as a voice for the hundreds of individuals that we serve at the Connecticut Mental Health Center (CMHC) who cannot personally be here today. My name is Luis Añez and as a licensed clinical psychologist who has worked in various capacities at the Hispanic Clinic of the Connecticut Mental Health Center (CMHC) for the past 20 years, I am here once again to share the unique accounts of a disenfranchised, yet growing, community afflicted with the consequences of mental illness, addiction, and poverty.

Over the years, your continued support has been essential in changing a story of hopelessness and fear to one of hope and recovery. At CMHC, we bear witness to the negative impact of mental illness, but we also see resilience and growth when people are provided the necessary support and treatment. They can recover and become productive and valued members of their community. The need for care is particularly evident among the growing Latino community. Latinos represent nearly 30% of New Haven's population, and as of 2012, data demonstrates that in the greater New Haven area, communities from Mexico, Ecuador, and Guatemala have each increased by over 70%. As a provider of mental health services to this community, I can not only endorse this as true, but can also attest to the severity of mental health needs among this population. Histories of trauma, abuse, and violence are often worsened by experiences of poverty, community violence, unemployment, substandard housing, and poor access to care.

I am here to ask you to please reflect on what CMHC cuts will mean for people at the Connecticut Mental Health Center. The proposed budget cuts will seriously compromise our ability to continue providing an already strained service to a vulnerable community whose last resort for care is CMHC.

As I did last year, I ask you to look and consider the following facts regarding our Hispanic Services when making your decision.

1. Nationwide, and in the state of Connecticut, the Latino community is a majority among the minority. As of July 1, 2014, census figures estimate the Latino population surpassing 55 million, or approximately 17% of the total U.S. population. It is expected that by the year 2060, the Latino population will total more than 119 million, comprising

an estimated 28% of the U.S. population. Latinos in Connecticut make up 13% of the state population, and in the city of New Haven, the numbers more than doubles to 28% of the total city population.

2. The Hispanic Clinic represents a national model of collaboration, training and culturally responsive community based mental health care. The Hispanic Clinic at CMHC is a collaborative endeavor between the Yale University Department of Psychiatry and the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Since its inception in 1973, the Hispanic Clinic has provided outpatient mental health and addiction services to the monolingual Latino community of the greater New Haven area. The Clinic is staffed by a multidisciplinary team of bilingual-bicultural clinicians who provide a comprehensive range of treatment services to an adult population aged 18 and over. Nationwide, the number of behavioral health professionals that identify as Latino remains inadequate - social workers at 11.6%; psychiatrists at 4.3%; psychologists at 6.2%; and counselors at 10.4%. **Training sites like the Hispanic Clinic represent one of the few places in the country that prepares students from the fields of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and social work to deliver empirically supported community-based, recovery-oriented, and person-centered behavioral health services in Spanish.**

3. People served at the Hispanic Clinic of CMHC present with long histories of chronic and persistent mental illness—for example, Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. This is consistent with national trends indicating that 90% of clients in public behavioral health settings have experienced trauma. Serious and persistent mental illness often means years of repeated hospitalizations, inconsistent access to treatment and medication, and debilitating psychiatric symptoms that have often strained relationships with family, limited their opportunity to secure gainful employment, and compromised their potential.

4. Our community is suffering, but we have the capacity to respond. Often times we are faced with the reality that there are things that we just cannot change. But the good news is that this is not one of those cases. Untreated mental illness affects individuals, families, and entire communities. There is the consequence of homelessness, the risk of continued victimization, and the fiscal costs as people access care through inappropriate, yet available venues such as hospital emergency rooms. We are in the privileged position where we can actually make someone's life better. With your continued support, we can continue to make a difference. Together we can recognize the strengths and resilience among this historically marginalized community and do our part to change the outcome of their story.

In closing, as a voice for the individuals we serve, I urge you to preserve funding for Latino services at CMHC. You are not simply investing in a faceless treatment intervention or program; your actions go far beyond that and will reap benefits that may not be immediately seen. **You are investing in human life, in someone's father, mother, son, and daughter. You are supporting the belief that all members of our**

community, regardless of language, ethnicity, and mental health status, are important and deserve the opportunity to have a life worth living.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Luis M Anez