

**TESTIMONY FOR H.B. No. 5044:
AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL
YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.**

Submitted By: Robyn M. Hawley, Ed.D, LCSW, Director of Behavioral Health
Catholic Charities, Inc. Archdiocese of Hartford

*To the Appropriations Health Subcommittee
February 18, 2016, Department of Mental Health And Addiction Services*

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon and Distinguished members of the Appropriations Health Subcommittee; my name is Robyn M. Hawley and I am the Director of Behavioral Health Services at Catholic Charities, Inc. Archdiocese of Hartford. Catholic Charities is a social services organization which provides services to over 26,000 individuals and families without regard to race, religion, or economic circumstances each year. The agency offers human services across 34 sites in the Hartford, Litchfield, and New Haven counties. A wide range of human services offered by the agency include: Outpatient Behavioral Health programs for families and children with significant mental illness and substance use disorders.

I request your urgent assistance in appropriating necessary funds to adequately fund mental health and addiction services. The current proposed budget will dramatically and negatively impact the well being of our community by inadequately funding DMHAS' grants for Outpatient Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment. In addition to cuts in grants in previous years, the Governor is proposing another cut of almost \$16 million dollars for mental health and substance abuse services. In addition, the Governor is proposing a cut of over \$34 million to the combined block grant "Agency Operations" account at DMHAS. Because there is no assurance that DMHAS would be required to evenly distribute these cuts across all programs, it is possible that a disproportionate amount could fall on, and in some cases, completely eliminate outpatient mental health and substance abuse programs altogether.

Without appropriate funding of these grants, providers of behavioral health services will be forced to close programs or drastically reduce services. Individuals and families in need of these services are already having a difficult time finding services. If funding is reduced or eliminated, they will have no options available to them. Instead, they may seek exponentially more expensive services in emergency departments or worse, not at all. They may end up in jail, become homeless, or become a danger to themselves or others. In particular, the effect on children can be extreme. Children are affected when a caretaker has behavioral health issues as well as when they have their own issues. Inadequate access to treatment results in increased stress in the home, higher incidents of dysfunctional family systems, and increased behavioral problems in the children. Those problems then play out at home, in schools and in the community. Investing in mental health and substance abuse services is not only a way of resolving problems, it serves as a proactive, preventative strategy for those who interact with people that suffer from such issues.

Some think that Medicaid can serve as a resource to replace money that has been provided by state grants. Unfortunately, the Medicaid rates do not cover the true cost of care. The additional cuts to grants are unsustainable and will, in many cases, close outpatient services for uninsured citizens. New and increased Medicaid enrollment will not resolve this ongoing problem.



Catholic Charities

Archdiocese of Hartford

The private non-profit mental health and substance abuse agencies that receive funding from DMHAS provide a low-cost alternative to using state employees or higher levels of care such as visits to the emergency department and inpatient treatment. We know that the legislature takes the needs and well being of CT residents seriously because for the last two legislative sessions, the legislature has restored funding to maintain finding for DMHAS' mental health and substance abuse programs. On behalf of our clients, I urge you to continue to support these services. Thank you.

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