

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**H.B. No. 5044 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017**  
**February 18, 2016**  
**Anthony Pierlioni, Plainville, CT**

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

I'm lucky to be here before you today. In middle school, my mother was in prison and I would sometimes see my father getting high right in front of me. These were two tremendous people who struggled with things that could have been avoided. My mother is proof of that. She is now a nurse, having worked with state funded non-profits to turn her life around. My father, and best friend, is now dead. He passed away at age 56, right in line with what is expected for people with mental health diagnoses.

The progress of my mother and tragedy regarding my father are what brought me to a career in social work, particularly mental health and addiction. I am the Manager of Social Rehabilitation and Young Adult Services at InterCommunity, in East Hartford. Interestingly, on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013, Governor Malloy visited Common Ground, our Social Rehab Program, the best place on Earth. He was there to tell our members that he believes in the need for mental health services and was dedicated to ensuring our people would be accounted for, since he had just proposed cuts to our budget. Two days later, the Sandy Hook Massacre occurred. Its aftermath brought on a flood of media attention, the vast majority of which was focused on gun control. I wonder how this budget can even be considered and the media not say anything about the connection between these two issues.

This whole budget situation comes at a time that is especially difficult to our small community. Just two days ago, we lost our most dedicated advocate. She was a person in recovery, who worked tirelessly to educate others on these important issues and to assist her peers in having a better life. She showed up every day, waiting for the doors to open, so she could get to work, helping and advocating for others in recovery. Sadly, like my father, she was another example of the short life-expectancy of our friends, neighbors, parents and children with mental health and/or substance use history.

Last year, she sat before this very committee and asked:

“Please think twice, when voting on this budget. Think of the mental health of a lot of people. You have their future in your hands. “

How many more tragedies will we allow to occur? How many more people will we let suffer? How many more people will we lose in this fight?

I encourage the committee to consider the dangers involved in cutting funding and simply hoping that people will be lucky enough to overcome their struggles. “Lucky” in the sense that I am. And if people dying isn't enough to make the change, consider the fact that we keep people out of the emergency room EVERY DAY. This is tough and often thankless work. The frequent cut proposals are proof of that on a macro, and wholly depressing, level.

Thank you,

Anthony Pierlioni