

**TESTIMONY OF
DR. JIM O'DEA
VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS OF THE
HARTFORD HEALTHCARE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NETWORK
SUBMITTED TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 18, 2016**

**HB 5044, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal
Year Ending June 30, 2017**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee, my name is Dr. Jim O'Dea, the Vice President of Operations of the Hartford Healthcare Behavioral Health Network. Our network of care includes the Institute of Living, Rushford Treatment Center, Natchaug Hospital, and the behavioral health programs at our acute care hospitals – Hartford Hospital, Backus Hospital, Windham Hospital, MidState Medical Center, and The Hospital of Central Connecticut. We are the largest provider of behavioral healthcare in the state of Connecticut.

I have worked in behavioral healthcare in Connecticut over the last 25 years and have experience as a clinician and administrator in inpatient, partial hospital programs, outpatient treatment, emergency and crisis services in both psychiatric and substance abuse programs. I am here to offer testimony on House Bill 5044. I strongly oppose the imposition of budget cuts for mental health and substance abuse disorder treatment services. These cuts would both destabilize an already challenged behavioral healthcare system and reduce options for individuals in our communities desperate for care and treatment.

All our citizens in Connecticut deserve access to the Right Care at the Right Time. You likely heard testimony this morning from our DMHAS Commissioner that the closure of 20 detox beds at CVH, for example, would not restrict access to care for citizens needing that care – that there is sufficient capacity elsewhere in our system to meet that need.

Well, respectfully, I've heard that song before. Five years ago, on behalf of the Connecticut Hospital Association, I offered testimony regarding the closure of

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Cedarcrest Hospital. I cited then in my opposition to that closure, the need for these intermediate care resources in multiple sites across Connecticut. We were promised that these would be put in place to address our citizens' needs with the closure of the hospital. We were promised that there would not be long delays in accessing appropriate, specialized care for our patients. We were promised that there would not be waiting lists.

We were promised much of what we were promised earlier today.

These programs however have not been put in place. Cedarcrest Hospital is now closed. I hold here a copy of a print-out from the DMHAS website from yesterday, February 17th. It shows a waiting list of 33 citizens of our state – waiting for access to specialized behavioral healthcare. A waiting list that was never going to occur. 33 people. And according to every newspaper, community dialogue, and forum – we are in the midst of a heroin crisis with drug overdoses and deaths occurring nearly every day. I respectfully ask that you do not enact further cuts to mental health and substance abuse treatment services included in HB 5044. We've been here before.

As my dear, departed friend Bob Davidson would tell you - There's still time to keep that promise you made.

Respectfully submitted,
James F. O'Dea, Ph.D., MBA