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Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee
300 Capital Avenue,
Hartford, CT 16106

Board Certified in Public Health:
National Board
NBPHE No.

Re: H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017: The Governor's Biennial Budget

Dear Legislators:

I would like to address the segment of the proposed budget recommendation to consolidate the State's 5 Regional Mental Health Boards and the State's 13 Regional Action Councils. I have had the high honor of serving for the last 10 and a half years as the Chairman of the Lower Fairfield County Regional Action Council, Communities for Action. I oppose this segment of H.B. 5044 for the following reasons and I ask that you take my points into consideration when voting upon this bill:

- The role of the State's Regional Action Councils (RACs) and the Regional Mental Health Boards are quite different and serve a different purpose.
- The Regional Action Councils provide a tremendous resource to numerous health, mental health, social justice, law enforcement, institutions of higher learning and grades Pre-K through 12, places of worship, and social services agencies across the state through:
 - Collaborative building between agencies

- Capacity-building of the staff and leadership of individual agencies
- Numerous training programs on topics that DMHAS has placed under the scope of the RACs such as:
 - Suicide prevention and postvention
 - Substance abuse prevention education and resource distribution
 - Smoking Cessation programming for the general population as well as specifically for the population segment that also lives with mental illness.
 - Legislative Breakfasts and events are held, which many of you may have participated in, that aims to not only provide an opportunity for our vast membership to not only hear from and speak directly with their legislators at the local state and national level, but also to provide those legislators with facts on substance abuse, suicide and mental illness challenges that may come before them. (Our RAC, Communities 4 Action) provided legislators with a large directory of the many topic experts in our Council who are prepared to help them with briefs, fact sheets and other data compilation for their use)
 - Grant writing, training on grant writing, and the securement of grant funding for local communities
 - Parent, student, teacher and leadership training on how to incorporate the development of assets in our young people
 - Supporting the development of parent groups such as the Fathers' Forum, Youth groups, annual no to low cost behavioral health conferences that bring CEUs to the professionals who work with our populations in the areas of mental health, wellness, addictions, suicide, family counseling, and alcohol and drug counseling
- An annual data compilation of statistics on drug and alcohol use, suicide rates, and the level of activity by each town or city in addressing this within each RAC's catchments area, which helps the Council and the Towns to better focus their energies in areas where it is needed.

- Organizing grass roots efforts to help local communities take the lead in addressing their mental health and addiction services problems
- Supporting local programs to better serve their communities
- Bringing in Block Grant Funding to local communities

The Regional Action Councils raise the vast majority of their funds from grant-writing, but the funds they receive from government sources are essential to them, to the communities, agencies and organizations they serve, and to the Government itself.

It is an evidence-based fact that for every dollar spent on prevention, which is what the regional action councils are all about, \$25 is saved in treatment costs. Many of the people in treatment require state funding to help pay for their care. We are in the midst of an unprecedented addiction crisis where prevention and access to well services and resources is essential.

I would not be opposed to consolidating the Regional Action Councils into fewer than 13 councils, as this could represent a much needed cost-saving, and I would suggest that if this is done, that the factor used to determine reductions would be through looking at the productivity of the existing RACs and selecting those who have offered the greatest value for money spent.

My background is in both public health and mental health, so I am offering you an expert opinion here. I currently have owned and operated a public health consulting firm since 2009 and served in local public health for seven years prior to that.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope you will opt not to combine the Regional Action Councils and the Regional Mental Health Boards as they are different and serve different functions.

Respectfully,

Stephanie R. Paulmeno