

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**

**Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget**

**February 18, 2016**

**Robert Pearston – Cromwell, CT**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Robert Pearston, I vote in the town of Cromwell, represented by Paul Doyle and Christie Carpino. I am the parent of a son who is diagnosed with schizophrenia, living in the community with services provided by River Valley Services in Middletown. I participate in a NAMI run support group and I am active with their public policy committee.

My son was diagnosed at the age of 15, and what followed was years of struggle to understand, treat, and come to terms with his illness. There is no such thing as a "cure" for schizophrenia, but there is recovery, where with medication, support and understanding a nearly normal life is possible. My son has achieved this at age 25. He lives in the community, works 2-3 days a week in a small office where they understand his strengths and weaknesses, supplying most of the IT and technical support for the group as well as routine data entry, invoicing and inventory tasks. He lives in an independent housing unit populated largely by the elderly, and has become the person everybody in the building comes to with smartphone, cable box or computer problems. He is a child care provider at our church, and has a particular rapport with the several autistic/special needs children in the Sunday School.

He is able to do this with section 8 housing support, medication from Husky "C" and counseling and psychiatric support from River Valley Services in Middletown. He has, like any person in recovery, the occasional rough patch, and as recently as last week had to call the Mobile Crisis Intervention Unit. This unit, which operates, I believe, out of Wheeler Clinic, spent an hour on the phone with him, and a costly possible ER visit/Hospitalization was avoided.

My question to the Appropriations committee is, quite simply, which of these supports do want to remove? The alternatives to maintaining an integrated, successful life in the community are either long term institutionalization, which this state has fortunately abandoned, or a spiral of homelessness, stigma and escalating interactions with law enforcement. Far too many of our persons with disabilities are receiving their treatment from the Department of Corrections. Dollars saved by arbitrarily cutting the DMHAS, Housing or DDS budgets will come back to the state in unnecessary hospitalization, law enforcement and corrections department expenses, and that's only the dollars. The human and moral costs are greater and harder to calculate.

This committee gets that, they've proven it in the past. What I'm asking for this time is for the committee to not only preserve but also protect these vital human services. To craft this off year budget legislation in a way that it cannot be reduced/eliminated by an arbitrary percentage imposed by a Governor or Commissioner.

Thank You.