



Donald A. Neel
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee regarding:

H.B. No. 5044 – An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30th, 2017

February 18th, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Suzi Craig and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy at Mental Health Connecticut (formerly known as the Mental Health Association of Connecticut).

I am here to encourage you not to not make cuts in the department of mental health and substance abuse services as designated through HB 5044. These cuts will hurt the 500,000 residents who benefit from our services, the 196,000 people in our agencies, and the health of the local economies that we are very much an integral part of.

As a statewide advocacy organization, direct service provider and educator, Mental Health Connecticut helps residents improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and reach their full potential. We use an evidence-based approach with four critical elements – Home, Health, Purpose, and Community – as our guide posts to helping the people we serve achieve recovery.

These four elements work in concert and rely on one another. Removing one element can seriously change the potential for a positive outcome. Imagine what it's like for someone transitioning out of supportive housing and into their first home. This is a huge step in someone's recovery. Now imagine moving into that first home but not having the skills to cook nutritious meals, the support to find work or go back to school, or the means to rebuild trust with family and friends. All of these steps are elements of attaining the balance of Home, Health, Purpose and Community. They are intertwined and necessary to achieving sustained wellness.

Just like these four elements, our work at Mental Health Connecticut and the work of so many of our colleagues is interdependent. Providing a supportive and well-rounded system of care requires the existence and support of all our sister organizations in behavioral, physical, and intellectual health. Together, we strive to integrate our worlds and provide the best possible opportunities for our friends and neighbors to be well. Impacting cuts in one area will ultimately affect the same population in other ways.

We also want to bring to light the importance of supporting another population: our workforce. We have over 250 employees at Mental Health Connecticut, living and working across the state. As a whole, 1 out of 9 jobs are with nonprofits in Connecticut. Of these nonprofit employees, 67% work in the health and human service field.



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We are our own economic engine. We live and work here. We are fellow tax payers who buy goods and services. We raise our families and we stay here because we are fulfilled by our work. You might say that, just like the people we serve, we too are striving to achieve our own personal wellness while contributing to the greater good of making Connecticut an amazing place to be.

As many of you know, the transformation in people's lives – those served by our services – can be dramatic. Any cuts will be devastating and will damage the stability we've worked so hard to achieve.

As you move forward with the difficult work ahead, please remember that what remains invisible to most of Connecticut is the living, breathing truth for so many of our friends and neighbors, and is critical to the health of our economy.

Just as our mantra of "Home, Health, Purpose, and Community," must work together to achieve wellness, so too must the core elements of our complex and integrated foundation: a robust and collaborative system of care, access to that care that then becomes a doorway to progress for our residents, and a workforce that stays and thrives in Connecticut.

Help us continue to build a positive future for our state and help support our efforts so we can all get beyond these very difficult times.

Thank you for your time and for your service.

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