

My name is Danielle Herbert. I am testifying on H.B. 5044. I am a registered voter from West Hartford, a sixteen-year employee of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board, a family member of someone who lived his adult life with a severe mental health disability and **I am opposed** to the proposed elimination to the RMHBs. RMHBs were created by state statute (Sec. 17a-484) over 41 year ago to advise DMHAS by evaluating state funded mental health services and programs. Our 500 volunteer members are composed of **providers of mental health & addiction svcs**, clergy, police, social workers, family members, concerned citizens and people in recovery. This diverse group of dedicated grass-root level volunteers ensure that a broad wealth of knowledge and experience are utilized in advising DMHAS and empowers people and families living with mental illness to advocate for themselves and others, and for improvement and efficiency in services. The Regional Boards are essential in safeguarding that services are delivered effectively and efficiently.

As I said, I have worked for the RMHBs for many years and as many people in this room know that when working in the non-profit sector that the work is not done for the high salaries but for the heartfelt commitment to the cause that is dear to us. My brother was a person who lived with a severe mental health disability and unfortunately past away last year. I was his trustee, his caretaker and I loved him. I know from experience how the mental health system works and know that without the work of the RMHBs that people like my brother's voice might not be heard. He gave other members a perspective on housing issues that they may have never known.

So what will the state loose?

- Information collection and priorities development by a large diverse group of volunteer citizens.
- Development of community partnerships for solutions on young adult needs, transportation, wellness, and health equity.
- Evaluation and guidance on best practices, consensus building, and coordination of numerous projects. A self-advocating platform.
- The RMHBs help leverage \$23M in federal funding.

During periods of short funds when services are being reduced, **oversight is more important** to ensure that services be effectively and efficiently provided. Please do not end the hard work of these small RMHB staffs and the many volunteers who have made the system more **efficient and effective**. I know you are making difficult choices but we get feedback on a grassroots level with a 2% paid workforce (10 staff and 500 volunteers), and we help **bring in 23 million dollars to the state** so why would you consider eliminating a program that helps the people it serves so much and helps bring in millions of dollars to the state. Please preserve the Regional Mental Health Boards.