



Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Proposed Budget Adjustments- HB 5044
DMHAS Regional Action Council Funding
February 18, 2016
Robert Francis, Executive Director
Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (RYASAP) -Bridgeport, CT

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Robert Francis, the Executive Director of RYASAP, a non-profit organization serving the Greater Bridgeport area. I am opposed to the proposed cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. If the cut of \$1.3 million and consolidation of the Regional Action Councils passes, it would have a harmful effect on the communities that my organization serves, harm the prevention infrastructure that has led Connecticut to be considered among the country as an innovative and model state, which will lead to a loss in future Federal dollars to address emerging issues associated with substances, namely opiate, underage alcohol, and marijuana use and addiction. I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

RYASAP was started as a prevention coalition, which won support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The success of the partnership and the foundation support inspired the SAMHSA "Drug Free Community" grants. The model was then replicated state-wide to what we have known as the "RAC". DMHAS adopted the Regional Action Council concept to ensure that the Local Prevention Councils in all 169 communities received the technical assistance that they need to implement community strategies to prevention substance abuse and encourage positive wellness strategies.

As a member of the Connecticut Prevention Network, all 13 Regional Action Councils throughout Connecticut:

- Fund and Support Community Prevention efforts through Local Prevention Council Programing.
- Provide Data and Technical Assistance to Municipalities and Community Groups with Surveys and Needs Assessments studies to track trends.
- Assist Municipalities and community organizations in obtaining additional funding for substance abuse prevention efforts.
- Report Prevention and Treatment gaps to DMHAS
- Advocate for Legislative Action and Public Policy Development
- Promote Evidence-based Substance Abuse and Mental Health Prevention Training.

Although we have seen successes in prevention during these 25 years, there is still more work to be done:

- With the steady increase of marijuana use among youth, more education and awareness programs have to be developed to counteract its low perceived risk among our most vulnerable residents.
- Although we have seen a steady decrease of cigarette use (5% of our regions youth, SIS 2014), many youth are picking up e-cigarettes for the first time and at alarming rates (24%, SIS 2014). E-cigarettes are not regulated by the FDA and is marketed to youth through deceptively attractive advertising and fun flavors. More education and training is needed at the community-level to address this emerging trend.
- As opiate addiction has become a prevalent issue facing the majority of CT communities, RACs have led efforts to reduce access to prescription drugs through the increase of available Prescription Drop Boxes at our Police Departments, advocating for legislative action for more first responders to carry the lifesaving drug, Narcan, and providing targeted education for prescribers, parents, and relators.
- Studies show that the more assets that young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive. Research shows that youth with the most assets are least likely to engage in four different patterns of high-risk behavior, including problem alcohol use, violence, illicit drug use, and sexual activity. When they have higher levels of assets, they are more likely to do well in school, be civically engaged, and value diversity. All Local Prevention Councils value the survey work provided through the RAC to best gauge their local prevention efforts.

Please think carefully about the ripple effect the lack of funding to the RAC will have on building and sustaining prevention efforts throughout our communities.

Robert M Francis, Executive Director, RYASAP
2470 Fairfield Avenue
Bridgeport CT 06605

RYASAP Programs include:

- Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance
- Health Promotion & Wellness
- Parent Leadership Training Institute
- Public Allies Connecticut
- Restorative Justice
- Safe Asleep: Smoke Alarm Installation
- YouthINC

REGIONAL YOUTH ADULT SOCIAL ACTION PARTNERSHIP

2470 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, CT 06605-2647 • phone: 203-579-2727 • fax: 203-333-9118
Website: www.ryasap.org