

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

H.B. No. 5044

AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.

February 18, 2016

Quyên Truong, West Hartford CT

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Quyên Truong and I am a registered voter in the town of West Hartford. I am here to testify on H.B. No. 5044 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017. I am opposed to any proposed cuts to the DMHAS and any mental health services and supports, and I am especially opposed to the proposed cut to the Regional Mental Health Boards, which would effectively eliminate this core service.

The Regional Mental Health Boards were created by concerned community members and forward thinking legislators in the 1970s, when most of the state mental hospitals shut down. The Regional Boards were created to hold state-funded mental health programs accountable to the people they serve. Regional Boards are the only organizations focused on representing people in recovery and their families. Regional Boards have been the voice for this marginalized community for over 40 years.

The Regional Boards' main function is to review and evaluate state funded mental health services, with involvement from people using those services. They help create accountability. They reassure that the \$700 million CT spends on Behavioral Health is money well spent. Regional Boards identify needs and service gaps. They were the first to identify the need for Young Adult Services in the 1990s, and they helped bring attention to critical mental health concerns after Sandy Hook by organizing dozens of Community Conversations about Mental Health. Regional Mental Health Boards also cultivate partnerships among local mental health agencies to deliver more effective, efficient care. During this tumultuous time, we need coordination among limited resources and accountability more than ever in our mental health and addiction services. We need to preserve the Regional Boards.

The Regional Boards are only 0.08% of the DMHAS budget. They leverage \$23 million in federal funding. They are the best return on investment from an economic and social standpoint.

If we lose the Regional Mental Health Boards, people with mental health concerns and families grappling with addiction issues will no longer have a voice. Our communities will lose access to core programs like Mental Health First Aid. Our local mental health agencies will lose the key coordination efforts to align their services with other programs. Our police will lose access to Crisis Intervention Training. Your constituents will not have a place to turn to for grievances, nor be able to offer critical feedback to mental health and addiction programs. And you will lose access to and connection with your most vulnerable constituents, many of whom would not have a voice without the advocacy and coordination by the Regional Boards.

Of all the cuts to mental health and addiction services, the one to eliminate Regional Boards is the worst. Please fund the Regional Mental Health Boards - the only mechanism for accountability of state-funded programs and the voice for people in recovery.