

**Testimony of Sheryl Sprague, Certified Prevention Specialist
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**H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

*Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services – Regional Action Council Funding
February 18, 2016 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing*

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana and Representative Dillion, my name is Sheryl Sprague and I serve as a Board of Director member for two RACs (Regional Action Councils). I am the Vice President of ERASE (East of the River Action for Substance Abuse Elimination) and a board member of the South Central CT Substance Abuse Council (SCCSAC). As a person who has worked for 19 years in Connecticut in the field of substance abuse prevention, I strongly oppose the significant cuts to regional action councils that will dismantle the current prevention network structure.

The RACs partner with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to assess local needs and assist communities to address substance abuse issues with community specific programs and initiatives that are aimed to reduce the impact of drugs abuse and provide local resources for individuals who are already in need of treatment. Local Prevention Councils depend on that supportive, collaborative relationship of the RACs. The data collected by RACS that is in-turn provided to local prevention councils has supported many Federal Drug Free Communities grant applications in our state, resulting in millions of dollars of revenue for substance abuse prevention.

Connecticut is faced with an overwhelming number of young people addicted to prescription drugs and heroin. The opiate overdose deaths in our state have reached unprecedented levels and a multi-faceted approach is needed that reaches from the State government to the individuals in each community.

The RACs continue to work directly with DMHAS and our local communities to provide education on opiates, Naloxone, and treatment options. Importantly the RACs have been able to move quickly to address local needs including medication drop boxes, opiate discussion forums and trainings for emergency responders.

In this region of the state, SCCSAC has been addressing opiate issues since collaborating with a Brown University study in 2011 that pinpointed prescription drug abuse in central CT. In 2015 alone SCCSAC provided education on opiates to 500 people as well as mental health and suicide awareness to more than 1000 persons.

SCCSAC and ERASE have also worked directly with communities throughout the state to educate community members on substance abuse, problem gambling, changes in marijuana use and laws, mental health awareness and suicide prevention.

As a Board of Director member of these Regional Action Councils I urge the Legislature to reject the severe budget cuts to RACs that would remove the services to local communities at this critical time.