

Testimony of Angela Rae Duhaime, M.A.

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 Dillon, my name is Angela Duhaime and I am the Community Educator at Southeastern Regional Action Council and a resident of Norwich, CT. I strongly oppose the grave cuts to regional action councils that will decimate the current prevention network structure.

As I sat at a roundtable last evening at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital, with Congressman Courtney, Senator Blumenthal, and Director Botticelli (ONDCP) alongside with numerous concerned citizens to discuss the “heroin and opioid epidemic” my mind raced with thoughts, answers, and solutions. However, I regretfully must report that the call for prevention was yet again unheard. If you have seen the news article in The Day, a symbolic picture even shows me with a raised hand politely waiting my turn. I was there by invitation on behalf of SERAC (Southeastern Regional Action Council) in my role as a Community Educator. I know very well that many of you are familiar with the work of the Regional Action Councils especially SERAC. I want to thank you for your continued support over the years and unfortunately here I am asking for it yet again. So as I patiently waited my turn to be heard and never was, I am sending you my perspective of the “drug epidemic” that has been waging on for decades.

My heart does more than just go out to those who have lost a loved one to drug addiction and suicide. It is one of the most painful tragedies to witness and to have as part of your life story. I empathize with your pain because I have personally experienced this tragedy more than I can count on two hands and professionally I am called to action every single day. It is truly one of the most painful experiences frankly because we know it **IS preventable**. At the core of law enforcement, education, healthcare, treatment, friends and family we believe “something” or “someone” can change this...and you are absolutely correct. While we may never save every single life as a measurable outcome, countless lives are saved and changed every single day in Southeastern CT. WE can change this. Prevention is a science based multi-tiered framework that creates measurable outcomes. The current rates of youth substance abuse in our region right now are showing **lower than state and national rates**. Why? Do you know how many communities in our region are actively implementing prevention strategies? **Thirteen out of the 20** towns in the southeastern region. That is more than half of the region. Do you know how many youth were surveyed in the school systems in this region between 2014-2015? The answer is **6,856**.

So I am here to put this in perspective for you. There is hope! A tremendous amount of hope. First let us be honest and start calling this what it truly is...**A Mental Health and Substance Abuse Crisis**. The regional action councils are responding to this crisis. SERAC trains hundreds of individuals across all sectors EVERY year in mental health first aid, suicide prevention, problem gambling

awareness, and substance abuse prevention. We have even expanded to provide multi-tiered prevention and intervention through a voluntary Trauma Response Team, distribution and training for **200 NARCAN kits**, and the expansion of safe disposal sites (which there are 10 alone in our region!). I could go on for pages with numbers and statistics but we are not waiting for a call to action. We heard it a long time ago. **We are in action.**

The trouble with the battle cry for prevention to be heard is that our first point will continue to remain that this is everyone's crisis. It does not belong to any single sector to solve. The answer is different across all our communities; the science is the same. The cry for prevention is in fact calling **every single person** to act. We can no longer accept countless missed opportunities to save lives. It is the responsibility of every citizen to do something about the mental health and substance abuse crisis in CT and across America. So I invite you to join us and expand our efforts if you are ready to act.

It is deplorable that any proposal sitting on a desk in Hartford includes any cut to the already incredibly small amount of infrastructure and funding that exists for prevention. The prevention funding cuts outlined in Governor Malloy's proposed budget would reduce the overall budget of the RACs by 80%. These cuts would decimate the RAC funding and would significantly impact the resources, technical assistance and services they provide to our communities. We know, for every \$2 spent in prevention, society saves \$10 in intervention and treatment costs. NO other agency is doing the prevention work that the RACs do. These cuts would prevent SERAC and other RACs from leveraging other funding sources into our region to address these issues. It would eliminate the ability to support and enhance local prevention initiatives. It would also eliminate local efforts to combat and prevent suicide, opioid overdoses, prescription drug misuse and youth substance use around the state.

Prevention should longer sit patiently at the roundtable with their hand raised awaiting their turn to speak.

This has been going on far too long.

We need to reject ANY cut to prevention and propose INCREASED sustainable funding sources so that we can all get back to work and resolve the true crisis at hand.

Sincerely,

Angela Rae Duhaime, M.A.