



**Testimony of Jennifer L. DeWitt
Executive Director, Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Action Council
Connecticut Prevention Network**

**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 Jennifer DeWitt, and I am the Executive Director at the Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Action Council (CNVRAC), one of 13 Regional Action Councils across the state who together, form the Connecticut Prevention Network, also known as CPN. I am here today to strongly oppose the grave cuts to regional action councils that will decimate the current prevention network infrastructure.

This measure would equate to an almost 80% cut in Connecticut's substance abuse prevention infrastructure, decimating mine, and other RACs across the state, which would cease to exist if this funding cut goes through.

The impact that this cut would have to our current bare-bones prevention infrastructure would be insurmountable. On the one hand, our state is working hard to effect change and to STOP the opioid problem that has occurred here in CT as well as the rest of the nation. Your regional action councils and our tireless network of local prevention councils and other volunteer community partners are working to educate the public, to increase access to care, to curb prescription drug abuse, to advocate legislatively, to work with law enforcement, school districts, chief elected officials, health care providers, consumers, and any and every one affected by this problem and having an impact on its change. Then on the other hand, this cut would essentially pull the carpet out from under these efforts.

There is a *continuum* of care when it comes to substance abuse and mental illness. That continuum is PREVENTION, intervention, treatment, and recovery. Please note, that in this continuum, prevention is the FIRST line of defense against the potentially life threatening effects of a substance use disorder and serious mental health conditions.

And please allow me to share for a moment, the ownership that is taken when I speak of "my" regional action council. I have been the Director of the CNVRAC for more than 12 years, and prior to this I spent a decade working in direct service as a clinician for a local treatment provider. What I learned over the course of that decade and which led me to my

Preventing substance abuse, addictions and other harmful behaviors

current role in prevention, is that if I wanted to stop addicted, hurting, traumatized individuals and families from walking through my door in the first place, I had to get to the root causes of their pain and suffering and prevent these things from occurring in the first place. Yes, I take ownership of my Regional Action Council, because I have seen first-hand over the past 12 years, how community collaboration, volunteerism, and environmental prevention strategies actually do affect change. I work closely with each of the 12 towns that I serve as their RAC Director, providing education, training, technical assistance, support with local-level data collection, implementation of evidence-based prevention practice, and links to regional, state, and federal prevention campaigns and efforts that some of my communities might not otherwise have awareness of or access to, given, how very little funding and attention already goes towards prevention efforts.

Together, and in just our service area alone, we have

- presented and discussed the DMHAS Video Back from the Brink: The Need for Narcan, to Local Prevention Councils, CNVRAC Steering Committee, CNVRAC Prevention Committee, and other partners
- disseminated 1000 Opioid Overdose Prevention Information Wallet Cards across CNVRAC
- performed legislative advocacy and had personal communication with Senators Blumenthal, Esty, Markley, Kane, Hartley, and Representatives Butler, Conroy, Noujaim, and Minor regarding the Comprehensive Addiction & Recovery Act and each of its steps: treatment alternatives, naloxone training, SBIRT (Screening for Brief Intervention & Referral for Treatment), medication-assisted treatment, and improved Prescription Monitoring Program tracking
- performed outreach to pharmacies in the CNVRAC service area to identify those carrying Narcan, to raise awareness about training to prescribe, and to place Medication Drop Box Site placards at pharmacy pick-up windows
- been working with school officials in one district to develop a comprehensive plan to present to chief elected officials to address opioid overdose prevention at the school & community level
- been working to develop a plan and seek funding to provide naloxone training in collaboration with NWRMHB at local health departments and to provide naloxone kits to training participants
- disseminated Opioid Detox Facilities list to CNVRAC e-mail recipients (LPCs, community partners, other committees)
- disseminated list of pharmacies currently carrying Narcan to all CNVRAC e-mail recipients
- delivered 17 Mental Health First Aid trainings, serving approximately 500 participants; Training includes educational unit on substance use disorders including opioid use and overdose response plan

In closing, none of the grassroots work that is currently done on the local level would happen without the support and structure of the entire Connecticut Prevention Network. These 13 agencies are Connecticut's first line of defense, and perhaps the most critical structure to maintain if you plan to include prevention as part of your ongoing care of CT citizens affected by substance abuse and addiction.

We urge you to reject the severe budget cuts to regional action councils and to keep intact the current CT Prevention Network structure.