

Testimony of Christine Miskell DVM MPH

**H.B. No. 5044 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures
for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017**

**Department of Mental Health and 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 Christine Miskell. I am an Epidemiologist with the Southeastern Regional Action Council (SERAC) and a resident of Colchester, CT. I am writing today to express my strong opposition to the proposed cuts to prevention funding in Connecticut.

In 1989, Connecticut legislators recognized the need for coordinated prevention activities in order to address the issue of substance abuse and other addictive behaviors at a local level. As a result, the Regional Action Councils (RACs) were created. Since then the RACs, including SERAC have been doing a tremendous amount of work on shoestring budgets in order to affect real change to benefit the residents of communities throughout the State. Every day the RACs work in communities across the State to reduce the impact of substance abuse and other addictive behaviors by educating communities about the risks of substance use and other addictive behaviors, by working to prevent or delay the onset of substance use among youth, by working to promote mental health and by promoting positive coping skills and resiliency.

Under the budget proposed by Governor Malloy, the already diminutive amount of money allocated to these prevention efforts will be cut by 80%. This cut will result in a small savings in the overall State budget but will effectively eliminate the ability to provide coordinated prevention efforts across our State.

Everyone has heard the calls to address the epidemic of heroin overdoses.

We are all aware of the changes in attitudes perceptions and use of marijuana throughout our country and our State.

None of us can forget the tragedy that occurred at Sandy Hook.

In 2014 and 2015, SERAC surveyed nearly 7000 youth in grades 7-12 in southeastern Connecticut. Those youth have told us a lot about what we need to do to address these issues.

Heroin Epidemic

Those already struggling with an addiction deserves treatment and the opportunity to recovery. Sadly, that road to recovery can be a long and difficult one. In 2015, SERAC received a donation of 200 naloxone autoinjectors. They were distributed to residents, treatment providers and law enforcement officers in the hopes of preventing overdose deaths. To this day, we are aware of at least 5 individuals (sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents) whose lives have been saved due to the availability of these autoinjectors .

*The true answer to this epidemic lies in the prevention of the addictive behaviors. **In the SERAC survey 0.3% of youth report ever having used heroin but 8.4% report having misused a prescription pain medication to get high.** We all know about the link between prescription opiate misuse and subsequent heroin addiction. As a result, SERAC is working to raise awareness about the dangers of prescription drug misuse. We have succeeded in getting prescription drug disposal boxes set up in 10 of the 20 communities in our region. These drop boxes promote safe disposal of unused prescription medications and reduce the likely hood of diversion and misuse.*

Marijuana Misinformation

In the SERAC survey, 9.1% of youth report having used marijuana in the past 30 days. That is nearly the same as the percentage of youth who report having used alcohol in the past 30 days (9.7%).

Throughout the country, the legalization of the use or marijuana for medicinal purposes and the legalization of recreational marijuana use are contributing to misconceptions among adults and youth about the harms associated with marijuana use.

SERAC is working with local communities to raise awareness about the fact that marijuana is addictive that marijuana use by youth can have a negative impact on brain development and that marijuana impacts reaction time and decision making both of which can result in unwanted consequences such as unplanned pregnancies, motor vehicle accidents, other injuries and death.

Mental Health Promotion

For many, substance use and subsequent addiction can be a misguided attempt at coping with stress or filling a void. **In the SERAC youth survey, more than 1 in 10 youth report having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.** Through our youth programs, SERAC is working to promote positive coping skills, stress management and resiliency among youth in Southeastern Connecticut. SERAC also provides training in Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aid and Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) suicide prevention to increase the chances of early detection and intervention for those who may be struggling with mental health issues.

We cannot let these and the many other efforts of the Regional Action Councils disappear.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO CUT PREVETION FUNDING

Respectfully submitted
Christine Miskell DVM, MPH