

Testimony Presented To The Appropriations Committee In Response To:
THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE 2016-2017 FISCAL YEAR

by Cheryll A Houston, Deputy Director
On behalf of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board
February 11, 2016

Chairman Bye, Chairman Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Cheryll Houston (resident of Fairfield) and I am writing to you today as the Executive Director of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board (SWRMHB). The Regional Mental Health Boards were designed to represent the community's voice: our Catchment Area Councils bring together consumers of mental health and supportive services, their family members, service providers, and appointed representatives of the towns we serve. It is safe to say that all of us recognize the very difficult budget situation the state faces this year, and we thank you for your efforts to balance the many needs of your constituents.

I am deeply troubled by Governor Malloy's adjustments to the second year of the two-year budget; specifically, the proposed \$55 million cut in funding from the Department of Developmental Services, the \$61 million cut in funding from the Department of Social Services and the \$71 million cut in funding from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

We realize that the Governor's goal of balancing the budget is important. However, it cannot be done at the expense of citizens desperately in need of *more* services, not *less*. Last year, CT social service providers lost tens of millions of dollars in state funding – painful cuts that impacted core health and human service delivery across the board. More cuts in service provision simply cannot be absorbed by the individuals and families in greatest need of our state's assistance and support.

Following the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the Advisory Commission presented a comprehensive final report that specifically mentioned the importance of providing mental health services to families in need. More than half of the 198-page report relates to mental health issues, and the importance of building “**systems of care that actively foster healthy individuals, families and communities.**” The report also points out that “**approximately half of young people qualify for some behavioral health diagnosis by the time they reach 18.**”

Yet less than one year later, it seems as though the hard work of the Sandy Hook Commission has been completely disregarded.

Instead, the Malloy administration has repeatedly cut funding for outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment. He has justified these debilitating cuts by arguing that more state residents have health care coverage and providers can recoup funding by billing insurance.

Unfortunately, the Governor's mathematics don't work. The rates paid by Medicaid generally fall below the cost of providing services, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services supports that finding.

Simply said, this year's funding cuts will force desperately needed results-based programs to close. Hospitals will be inundated with people seeking care through emergency rooms (a far more expensive option), and those emergency rooms are already struggling with their own funding cuts.

These cuts further destabilize a supportive service system that is already stretched thin – further reducing or eliminating funding for hospitals, community health centers, school-based health clinics and respite programs cannot be the answer.

I urge all members of the Appropriations Committee to recognize that human services – particularly mental health services - in CT are chronically underfunded and any financial cuts will prove devastating, seriously reducing or eliminating essential services for thousands of individuals desperately in need across the state. Please protect your constituents and protect CT's most vulnerable citizens by protecting funding for human services in CT.

Thank you.