

**Testimony  
on the Appropriations Committee Hearing on DMHAS & DPH Budget  
February 18, 2016**

**Melissa C. Ferrara Killingworth CT**

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Melissa Ferrara and I am a registered voter in the town of Killingworth as well as the Killingworth town representative on the Region II Regional Mental Health Board and the founder of the Changing Minds Advocacy Group.

I am writing to testify on the Governor's Proposed Budget Cuts to the Regional Mental Health Boards.

I am opposed to the proposed cuts to the Regional Mental Health Board and those to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The proposed \$584,000 cuts would defund the Regional Mental Health Boards which were created 40 years ago by the CT legislature and are stronger than ever today! The RMHBs are the community's voice in the oversight, coordination, and evaluation of the behavioral health system. The state will lose critical services that the boards consistently and effectively provide. These services include needs assessment and planning for behavioral health services, evaluation of the behavioral health service system, community education and engagement, and the opportunity for equal representation and empowerment of consumers, family members, and providers so assure improved services for all. The RMHBs produce amazing results and touch thousands of lives on a relatively low budget. With an average of 2 staff and hundreds of volunteers, the \$584,000 in state funding helps to bring in \$23 million in federal funding!

One of my roles on the RMHB is that I organized and participated in Community Conversations about Mental Health in my town of Killingworth. This is a wildly successful nationwide program where caring, invested community members work together to identify goals and complete projects that ensure persons with mental health issues in their community have access to quality services and support so they can lead healthy, purposeful lives. These projects are usually completed with donated time and talents avoiding the need to request state and federal funding. Our Community Conversations has resulted in the creation of an advocacy group whose mission is to provide education and awareness about mental health, increase mental health training opportunities for our first responders, town officials, clergy, teachers and community members, and work alongside existing organizations to reduce the stigma of mental health. In doing so, we hope to promote a caring community where those who need services feel empowered to seek out services. All of this has occurred because of the support, guidance, and resources of our regional mental health board.

I urge you to prevent these harmful cuts to ensure crucial services are available to the residents of Connecticut.

Thank you for your attention to these important services and supports.