

Testimony of Kati Mapa, MSW Intern  
Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, Inc.  
Before the Appropriations Committee of the  
Connecticut General Assembly  
February 18, 2016

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. My name is Kati Mapa. I am a registered voter in the city of Norwich, and a student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I am addressing you today on behalf of the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, where I have served as an intern for the past 5 months.

I have learned many lessons in my social work classes, as one would hope when paying for a Master's degree. I have been taught strategies to engage clients and communities, tips to analyze data and people, and tactics to run meetings and organize for change. I have been taught theories and interventions and best practices on a wide variety of topics.

**But the most valuable lesson I have learned is “to respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person,” (NASW Code of Ethics).**

As with many of the best lessons in life, this truth has been cemented through experience. In my short time at the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, I have seen firsthand how the work of the Boards affirms the dignity and worth of the people they serve, and just how valuable this work is to the community.

The Regional Boards engage and represent the community's voice in the oversight, coordination, and evaluation of the behavioral health system. They involve all stakeholders in their process: people with mental health issues, their family members, concerned citizens, providers, and town leaders. Community members are empowered to advocate for their needs through the Catchment Area Councils, site visits, and other community engagement projects.

It's been said that having a role in shaping the system is at least as important to recovery as the services themselves, and the Regional Boards provide an effective way for constituents to voice their concerns and ideas, thus promoting the recovery and the dignity of their members.

**There is no other structure that so fully empowers the community to participate in the planning and monitoring of mental health services.**

The Regional Boards do a lot for the state. On a tiny budget, they provide independent oversight of local mental health services, and in partnership with the Regional Action Councils, help to leverage \$23 million in Federal funding. The Boards also provide education, facilitate dialogues, coordinate Mental Health First Aid training, and disperse information and resources to community members, providers, and town leaders, all with an average of just 2 staff members each. The Regional Boards are respected by their

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communities and local service providers, and listened to by town leaders, department officials, and state legislators.

In a time of budget deficits and cuts, mental health service providers are being asked to accomplish more with less. More work with less staff. Better outcomes with less funding. More results with less support. In times like this, it's all the more important that the consumers' voices be heard and included in the decision-making process.

But under the proposed plan, the drastic reduction of funding and the consolidation of the Regional Boards and Regional Action Councils would essentially eliminate the Regional Mental Health Boards. Instead of protecting the voice of the client, the best mechanism for empowering members will be lost.

Please restore the Regional Mental Health Boards to their fully funded levels, and help ensure that the community's voice will continue to be heard.

Thank you.