

Testimony of Todd Bieri
Before the Appropriations Committee
In Opposition to HB 5044
An Act making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017
February 18, 2016
Todd Bieri, West Hartford, Connecticut

Good evening Senator Bye and Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Todd Bieri. I am a registered voter in the town of West Hartford.

I am here to testify in opposition to H.B. No.5044, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

I am opposed to the proposed cuts to DMHAS and any mental health services and supports.

When I was in a State Hospital several years ago, what helped was having quality staff and enough workers to provide counsel and therapeutic activities. A few days ago I visited someone in Connecticut Valley Hospital. Apparently cuts to the hospital staff had already taken place, because they were very short staffed. Granted it was a holiday, but a staff person told me that this is a regular occurrence. I learned that it is common for them to have 2-3 staff there for the entire unit when there are supposed to be eight staff. This is not only immoral, but unsafe for the patients. There are people who have physical impairments on the unit. If one person falls and is hurt and a fight is also occurring, the staff would have difficulty handling all of this. Some staff are working 75-80 hours per week. This short staffing is a recipe for disaster.

Next I would like to talk about case management services at UConn Outpatient Psychiatric department also slated for reductions. The case manager at UConn helped me with complex insurance issues, at a time when I was feeling very depressed and had to fill out paperwork for DSS that was causing disabling anxiety and depression. She gave me assistance and support which helped to ease the process of filling out the forms. Also a friend of mine, after 6 bad housing situations, was helped by a social worker at UConn who found him safe and affordable housing.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to talk about the Regional Mental Health Boards slated to be eliminated. They have helped consumers like me and other people with emotional challenges have a voice and input into the mental health system. The Boards and the consumers inform each other about mental health services that are working and make recommendations to improve services. The Board is an important liaison between the legislative process and the consumers, informing us on what we need to take action on. Without the Boards there are no checks and balances to help determine what the mental health system actually needs because people in authority wouldn't know what kinds of issues people are having trouble with until they read it in the news. The State would dictate what they think we need without actually knowing what people in the community are really experiencing and actually need. Without the Boards the mental health system is like a ship in a storm, without a rudder, aimlessly drifting and destined for disaster and the people with mental illness are its casualties. Please fund the mental Health System adequately!

Thankyou,

Todd Bieri