

**Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee
on Governor's proposed Midterm Budget adjustments FY 2017**

IN OPPOSITION

**H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR
THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

Re: Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Budget

February 18, 2016

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM ACOSTA

Bridgeport, CT

Good evening Sen. Bye, Rep. Walker and members of the committee. My name is William Acosta and I am from Bridgeport. I come before you today to address *Governor's Bill No. 5044*, "An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2017, Regarding the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Budget."

I would like to take just a moment to say "thank you" to you, madams chair and the members of this committee for all of the hard work that you do day after day to do right by your constituents and the citizens of this state who represent so many varied interests and agenda. I am a proud voter and I plan to continue to be a proud voter.

I come before you today to address the proposed reductions in the state budget through this bill that cuts millions of dollars earmarked for mental health and substance abuse treatment and services for the fiscal year that begins in July of this year.

I serve as Housing and Advocacy Coordinator at Bridge House in Bridgeport. Bridge House is a nonprofit psychosocial rehabilitation day program—or more commonly known as a Clubhouse program—that serves adults, *or clubhouse members*, living with mental health conditions. The cuts could very likely affect funding for *all* Clubhouse programs across our state.

Beyond the title that I carry at Bridge House, my personal passion for this work comes from *my own humble* lived experience as the parent of a young adult son who has had a lifelong mental health condition. There is an intense personal emotional pain that comes with witnessing loved ones in despair—and we can't personally help them. Truth be told, *not one* of us is completely free of being at least relatively close to someone with a disability and a

story to tell. But for me and many others, that translates into a relentless energy to serve daily and make a difference in the life of someone who might not otherwise be able to help him or herself.

Over the past 8 years, my son has very heavily relied on and benefitted from the employment, education, housing, involvement in local and state advocacy and becoming an active voter himself, young adult programming and socialization supports that Bridge House gives him *and some 250 active clubhouse members daily*. Day after day, Bridge House, numerous other clubhouse programs like it, Regional Mental Health Boards and services like the CT Legal Rights Project provide assistance that honors the value, the integrity, the respect, the honor that so many of our people living with mental health conditions so sorely deserve, have earned and must receive every day.

Lives truly do matter, and I appeal to your conscience; to your vision; to your compassion, and I respectfully request that these proposed cuts in funding to Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services programs and services—be challenged and avoided. Thank you again, madam chair and members of the committee.