

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
On Governor's proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments FY2017
H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE
FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017
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Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Howard Drescher and I am a registered voter living in the Town of Mansfield. I wish to submit my comments on the Governor's proposed midterm budget adjustments related to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and the Department of Public Health (DPH).

I understand the fiscal crisis we find ourselves in and that these will be hard decisions for legislators. However, I must express my concern about and opposition to the deep and devastating proposed cuts to mental health and behavioral health services and supports.

My wife and I are parents of a woman who has lived with a severe and persistent mental illness for nearly 30 years. This condition has devastated her life and, through no fault of her own, she, like thousands of others, is totally dependent on public benefits.

Two things have made a difference for her – the continued loving support of her family and her access to mental health care available through United Services, a provider of behavioral health care in a large area of eastern Connecticut. United Services provides regular counseling and medication review. Her visits to United Services provide regular human contact for a person who has few friends or social contacts. This vital strand in the social safety net has been critical for her well-being.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness has given Connecticut a "B" rating on its A-to-F scale of quality of mental health services. Only 6 states have that rating, and none have an "A". The state, and the families and advocates for people with mental illnesses, have painstakingly built an excellent structure of care and support.

For example, Connecticut has taken a strong approach to housing, with a commitment to the goal of ending chronic homelessness in the state. The state and towns have saved millions of dollars in excess costs for hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and other costly, yet temporary interventions. And it goes without saying that people who are ill and poverty-stricken should

not be forced to live on the streets because they can't access housing. The state should continue its support for this vital goal through continued investment in Supportive Housing.

The proposed deep cuts in financial support for the mental health safety net threaten to undo the state's hard work and deprive some of our most vulnerable citizens of life-saving support and services. And in the longer run, community-based services are far more cost-effective than emergency rooms, prisons and the streets, which become the fall-backs when the community fails.

I urge you to be extremely judicious in your approach to mental health care and all related aspects of our social safety net. I would prefer that you not cut anything, but if you must, do so with great care, understanding that there is a real and potentially devastating effect on the lives of actual people, many of whom are invisible in our society.

I urge you to protect the health and wellbeing of our CT residents by supporting these essential and core services and supports.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony and these crucial services and supports!

Howard Drescher, Mansfield, CT